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**Making Sense of Organizational Change: A Storytelling Approach**

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*Award date:*  
2010

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**MAKING SENSE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE:  
A STORYTELLING APPROACH**

Graham Paul Abbey

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Bath  
School of Management  
May 2010

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Graham Abbey



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Completing a PhD on a part-time basis is often a solitary pursuit, one in which time is grabbed between things – clients, projects, dinner and bed. However, the support I have received from a few key people has meant that the experience of these fragmented times has always been a joy and, in many unforeseen ways, life changing. Professor Andrew Brown, my supervisor, has been an inspiration throughout, helping me give structure to my work and my thinking, yet never intruding, as he focused on creating the conditions in which I could succeed. He has always listened, always put himself out for me and drunk a lot of extra hot lattes! Kate, my wife, has kept me grounded in what is important within my research and in life outside. Announcing my intention to start my PhD a few weeks before our son was born cannot have been the easiest thing to hear and, in retrospect, a crazy idea! None of this would have come to anything without the managers and employees of De Vere Group, in particular those at Grand Harbour Hotel and Royal Bath Hotel, who gave their time to be involved in my research, without any requirement for a return. Finally, I would like to thank my father, who passed away at the end of 2009, for the example he set for me in life. He never really understood my desire to complete a PhD, yet as always I had his support and admiration and I aspire that I can do the same for my children - Caitlin, Daniel and Nell.



## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to analyse organizational change, focusing on the meanings attributed by participants in planned and unplanned processes of organizational change, in a large, UK hospitality company. Framed within the narrative meta-paradigm, this research employs a qualitative, interpretive, social-constructionist perspective, and considers change in organizations as constituted by alterations in people's understandings, encoded in narratives, and shared in conversations. The thesis draws on prior publications in the fields of narrative and organizational change, including the sensemaking, power and identity literatures. Data was co-created through sixty-six semi-structured interviews in a single, multi-site case study, augmented by informal observations and assessment of written materials. The research account tells the stories of: organizational change; the responses from members to change; and the shifts in power, control and autonomy. These narratives of change were prepared through an interpretive analysis of the interview transcripts, and the study provides a reflexive commentary on the research, through vignettes of the researcher's experience. In the discussion, three readings interpret the case study from a narrative, an organizational change and an autoethnographic perspective. The primary contribution of the thesis is empirical, providing an in-depth case study that describes a complex organizational landscape, at two luxury hotels, into which a managerial initiative, *Shine*, was launched, and addresses the limited presence of narrative case studies on change. Through the application of existing theory to this empirical resource, the thesis contributes to understandings of sensemaking, power and identity during continuous change. The study argues for the significance of reflexivity in storytelling research, and the need for practitioners to embrace the socially constructed nature of 'realities' in working with organizational change. More generally, the thesis has demonstrated the value of a storytelling approach to understanding the complexities of organizational change, while identifying limitations to plurivocal storytelling as a research method.



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This thesis tells the story of a hotel business undergoing both planned and unplanned processes of change. The work is framed within the narrative meta-paradigm, and contributes to the linguistic turn in social sciences (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) by analysing how sense is made of organizational change, by the members of this large, private-sector organization. The thesis adds to the literatures on organizational change, storytelling and reflexivity, by providing an in-depth case study, and filling a shortfall in the empirical data in these domains.

Scholars have frequently considered change an extraordinary activity (e.g. Lewin, 1947), something distinct from a naturally stable organization. However, accounts of daily work experiences reveal frequent improvisation and innovation (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). This suggests continual adaptation as an alternative frame for analysis. The contrast between episodic and continuous change has become a more prominent feature of the organizational change literature since the 1990s (Weick & Quinn, 1999), as has the complexity of change, with change described as 'messy' in nature (Berg, 1979) and full of inconsistencies (Sköldberg, 1994). Following Ashby's law of requisite variety (Conant & Ashby, 1970) a sufficiently complex approach is, therefore, required to analyse change processes (Colville et al., 1999: 133-134). The growing body of research on stories in organizations, and on the related concepts of myths, legends, tales and accounts, etc. (Myrsiades, 1987) has demonstrated the suitability of a narrative approach to understand organizational change. For example, stories have been described as acting as: a unifying device in complex environments (Wilkins, 1983); as providing the 'social glue' (Smith & Simmons, 1983: 377) for organizations to act as a whole (Myrsiades, 1987); as reducing the chaos and randomness of everyday life (O'Connor, 1997); and suitable for understanding a highly politicised environment (Currie & Brown, 2003). The utility of stories in this environment is asserted by Gabriel (2000: 239):

“the world (both outer and inner) is irrational, disorderly, puzzling, and threatening, our actions often lead to unanticipated results, and, in spite of our best attempts to control our lives, we constantly face situations that we had not anticipated. Under these circumstances, science, with its multi-causal analysis, its statistical and probabilistic links, can at best partially meet our sensemaking needs. So, we turn to narrative forms of explanation, interpretation, and sensemaking.”

In adopting a narrative perspective, I have taken organizational change as alterations in the narratives that people tell (Humphreys & Brown, 2002) as organizational members interact, with the communication between them *being* the organizational change, rather than a means to explain a shift from one state to another (Ford & Ford, 1995). As “sensemaking is best described as an ongoing conversation” (Colville et al., 1999: 131), I have considered the development and sharing of stories as the process by which sense is made of the socially-constructed, changing realities of organizational life. This does not deny that other changes take place, such as alterations in physical aspects of organization (Senge, 1990), but that the meaning of change is embedded in the stories told, both public and private. From this interpretive perspective, action is based on a sequence in which individuals attend to environmental cues, interpret their meaning by linking them with existing cognitive structures, and then externalise these interpretations through concrete activities (Porac et al., 1989). My thesis is, therefore, written from the ontological position that reality is a product of individual consciousness, not something external and ‘out there’, and my methodological approach is qualitative, seeking to understand, rather than predict and control (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000: 502). While researchers have begun to understand the dynamics of storytelling, drawing on such domains as anthropology (Myrsiades, 1987), there remains significant scope for further conceptual development and supporting fieldwork. This study sets out to contribute to the understanding of narrative in the domain of organizational change, as well as providing a detailed, multi-site, case study of change in a single organization, as an empirical resource for other researchers.

## 1.2 REFLEXIVITY

My influence on the stories told and retold throughout this research activity has been a topic of frequent reflection for me. As well as learning about processes of change, I have been experiencing my own personal development. These two interpretive activities are unavoidably intertwined, and I have sought to maintain a reflexive position throughout. To highlight the presence of my own voice I have included vignettes written from my experience in the first person. Vignettes are devices described by Van Maanen (1988: 136) as “personalised accounts of fleeting moments of fieldwork case in dramatic form”, which enhance “the representational richness and reflexivity of qualitative research” (Humphreys, 2004: 840). My intention with these vignettes was to allow readers greater access to my own sensemaking and to “return the author openly to the qualitative research text” (Lincoln & Denzin, 1997: 413).

### Vignette 1.1 – ‘Put more of you into it’

I couldn't remember a time when I had been so nervous. I had spent the last two nights with little sleep, tossing and turning; leading academics' names running through my head – Boje, Gabriel, Brown and Humphreys, Rhodes... How was I going to remember who all these people were, let alone what they stand for? It is the day of my transfer examination - the day when I get to formally join the PhD programme – I hope, and I am on the long walk from the Pay and Display Car Park at the University of Bath to meet my supervisor, Professor Andrew Brown, for a latte. Not sure I need caffeine to stimulate me now, valium might be more appropriate. It is moments like this I start to wonder why I am doing this to myself. I recall Andrew asking that question when we first met nearly three years before in February 2005. I think I gave some weak answer about personal growth and stretching myself. Little did I know then! Right, I need to find a Gents and quick.

Ok, so bumping into one of my examiners in the toilet isn't so bad, but why did I have to suggest we stop meeting like this! Nerves again, I guess. Now he thinks I am a real idiot!



So, all set up and ready to go. I have got my ten minute presentation ready, why am I still so nervous? I spend my working life interviewing Chief Executives, presenting to management boards, debating issues with senior managers. But this is personal, this is about me. It's not my work that is being examined, it is me. I am naked before them, without my consultancy façade to hide behind. And now we are all packed together in this small office, me, Andrew, two examiners and a chairman. The examiners look at each other, their looks asking each other who should start. One speaks, "Before we start, we wanted to tell you that we are happy with the standard of your work and we will be passing you through this exam. We thought we could have a more helpful discussion if you knew that." My relief must have been palpable.

I took comprehensive notes, which was a good thing, because much of what followed was a blur of emotions. I remember the examiners closing advice though, "Put more of yourself into your writing, make this your own." I don't think even then I realised just how much of 'me' there was going to be 'in my work' or just how central an issue that would turn out to be.

### **1.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

It was essential requirement for this study to meet the ethical standards for qualitative research. My primary ethical concerns were to ensure openness, and to maintain confidentiality. I maintained a clear and open purpose with the representatives of the case study organization, as well as with the interviewees. I prefaced each interview with a statement of my aims, and how I intended to maintain the confidentiality of the data collected. An example of this introduction is included in Appendix 1. I used a professional transcription company to produce the interview transcripts and the company's representative signed a Non-disclosure Agreement (NDA). The transcripts and audio recordings have been securely stored, and have been accessible only by me. The managers and employees interviewed have only been referred to by job title, to protect the confidentiality of the statements made. A full list of transcript numbers, job titles, locations and interview dates is included in Appendix 2.

#### **1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

This thesis has been organised into nine chapters. After this brief introduction, in chapter 2, I have reviewed the narrative and organizational change literatures, with a particular concern for the intersection between the two. In reviewing the storytelling literature, after reviewing the definition of narrative (2.2), I have focused on themes most relevant to organizational change: sensemaking and complexity (2.3); power and politics (2.4); and, identity and culture (2.5). The discussion of a narrative approach to change is briefly set in the context of the broader change literature, and my aim has been to locate a narrative approach amongst other, perhaps more established, approaches to change. I have not provided a detailed review of the extensive work on organizational change.

Chapter 3 establishes the ontological and epistemological position of this thesis, before describing my methodological approach. The journey to key methodological decisions has been described, including the use of a single, multi-site, in-depth case study. I have included the details of the interviews conducted, the resulting transcripts produced, and the approach to their analysis and presentation. In this chapter, I have also introduced the theme of reflexivity, in particular in relation to my role as both researcher and consultant in the host organization.

Chapters 4 through 7 present my research data. I have told the stories of the case study organization using the words of the managers and employees, interwoven with my own narrative. I have also extracted, from my interviews, more substantial 'small stories' (Georgakopoulou, 2006). This approach follows the 'new' tradition in narrative research (Bamberg, 2006) by "paying attention to not only the big stories with a coherent progression of events and stable plot-lines ... but also the short, fleeting and fragmented 'small stories' that are constructed in ordinary conversational contexts" (Whittle et al., 2009). The first of the data presentation chapters sets the scene by giving background on the organization in which my study took place, De Vere Group,

and the hospitality market in which it operates. I then present the stories of change from within De Vere from three perspectives: the nature of organizational change (in chapter 5); how managers and employees reacted to the organizational changes they experienced (in chapter 6); and, the alterations in power between organizational groups (in chapter 7). In chapter 5, the notions of episodic and continuous change (Weick & Quinn, 1999) have been used to organise the stories of change, particularly concerning the customer service initiative, *Shine*, sponsored by De Vere senior management, and the unplanned acquisition of the business, by the Alternative Hotel Group (AHG). Chapter 6 presents the stories of both 'negative' and 'positive' responses to these changes, and recognises that the classification of reactions was subjective, both for managers and employees recounting their experiences, and for me, in authoring the chapter. Stories about shifts in power, control and autonomy feature in chapter 7. The narratives about the changing relationships between head office, middle managers and employees are compared, as well as the use of power by two senior managers, the Chief Executive and the General Manager of the Grand Harbour, one of the two hotels involved in the study.

Chapter 8 discusses this data in the context of my literature review and methodology through three readings: a narrative reading (8.2); an organizational change reading (8.3); and an autoethnographic reading (8.4). The autoethnographic reading reflects on the vignettes presented throughout the thesis, and uses my field notes to tell the 'hidden' story of the construction of my data presentation chapters. The thesis is concluded in Chapter 9, presenting a further reading of discussion chapter (9.2), before the clarification of my contribution to the field of narrative and organizational change research (9.3), as well as limitations of the thesis, and areas for future research (9.4).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study takes a narrative approach to examining change in organizations, taking the perspective that “what an organization is and everything that happens in and to it can be seen as a phenomenon in and of language.” (Boje et al, 2004: 571). The work contributes to the linguistic turn in the social sciences (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000: 137), which began in the late 1970s and “was soon accompanied by a ‘literary turn’” (Czarniawska, 1999: 48). The rise of this perspective was in reaction to the years following the Second World War where the ‘scientization’ of social sciences (Lepenes 1988) exploited the technical developments made during the war. Narrative is a specific topic within the broader domain of discourse analysis, a movement that has played a significant role across the arts, humanities and social sciences (e.g. Grant et al., 1998, 2001; Keenoy et al., 2000; Myrziades, 1987; Oswick et al., 2000; Potter & Wetherall, 1987). The growth of interest in organizational culture and symbolism during the 1980s and 1990s supported a continued focus on narrative as a means “to explore the meaning of organizational experience” (Rhodes & Brown, 2005: 3). Today, as asserted by Rhodes and Brown (2005: 3), narrative has many uses, singularly or in combination: a form of data (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1976); a theoretical lens (Pentland, 1999); and a methodological approach (Boje, 2001). As a consequence of such varied applications it has been argued that research into stories and storytelling “has produced a rich body of knowledge unavailable through other methods of analysis” (Stutts & Barker, 1999: 213).

Narrative brings with it approaches that favour pluralism, relativism and subjectivity (Lieblich et al, 1998: 2) and, in contrast to positivist perspectives, stories constitute “the very texture of events” (Sköldberg, 1994: 233) rather than acting as a means to find another ‘reality’ behind or under the data. Bruner (1991: 5) supports this use of narrative arguing that it “was perhaps a decade ago that psychologists became alive to the possibility of narrative as a form not only of representing but of constituting reality.” This social

constructionist view contends that reality is made and remade in our ongoing interpretation of the world, and as a consequence “meaning and knowledge are constructed, and not ‘found’ in things and events” (Czarniawska, 2001: 254). Studying narrative gives access to individual interpretations of experience, as Maines (1993: 27) argues: “the ‘empirical world’ – the objective world of facts and doings – may well exist but that it cannot be directly known”. Thus narrative can not be simply considered as representing reality, a phenomenon referred to as the “crisis of representation” (Rhodes, 2001: 8). Counter to the usual implication that in studying an organization researchers are “revealing the ‘reality’ behind ‘appearances’” (Czarniawska, 1997: 57) examining narrative is considering the very substance of organizations and organizing directly.

A narrative approach offers a number of benefits to studying organizational change. Firstly, it enables a polyphonic approach, one that allows “us to listen for and to the voices of all who are working together” (Hazen, 1993: 16), giving a way to examine organizational memory, which comprises “not one grand storytelling but many distributed centers of local tellings” (Boje et al, 1999: 243). Secondly, the ‘messiness’ of change (Berg, 1979) can be reflected in this polyphonic and subjective approach of narrative - that is, narrative affords researchers the requisite variety (Conant & Ashby, 1970) to analyse the complexities of change. Thirdly, as well as insight at the institutional level, a narrative approach allows access to individual stories as “human beings think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (Sarbin, 1986b: 8), as they make sense of their worlds. This process of understanding, or sensemaking, is described by Czarniawska (1999: 17) as: “attempts to integrate a new event into a plot, whereby it becomes understandable in relation to the context of what has happened”. As a consequence, narrative is a method that has proved “particularly useful for addressing the unmet challenge of integrating culture, person and change”, (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004: viii) or as Boje (1991a) asserts more succinctly:

“stories are the blood vessels through which changes pulsate in the heart of organizational life”.

This review explores definitions of narrative before setting out the major arguments in the narrative literature, on subjects critical to examining organizational change, namely: sensemaking and complexity; power and politics; and identity and culture. The second section draws attention to the diversity of definitions applied to narrative and storytelling (e.g. Robinson & Haupe, 1986; Ricoeur, 1984; Cunliffe et al., 2004 and Sarbin, 1986b), in particular the contrast between approaches that draw attention to story structure and those focusing on meaning (Barry & Elmes, 1997: 431). The third section builds on the work of Weick (1995) on sensemaking, to apply this significant function of narrative to the complexities of organizational change. This is followed in the fourth section by the discussion of power and politics, a key theme for both change and narrative. This section explores how the narrative approach brings new insights, as Czarniawska (1999: 57) argues: “organizational power, influence and change are generally described by physical metaphors”. The issues of identity and culture are explored in the next section, as these constructs are often a point of focus during significant organizational change. The sixth section provides an overview of the topic of organizational change and, more specifically, discourse approaches to change. The focus is narrowed further in the seventh section, through the consideration of a narrative perspective, which is seen by some scholars (Tsoukas, 2005: 96) as offering greatest potential for understanding the nature and complexity of organizational change. This final section builds towards the argument that “change occurs with alterations in the stories that people tell” (Brown & Humphreys, 2003: 139), placing narrative at the heart of organizational change.

## **2.2 DEFINING NARRATIVE**

‘Narrative’ and ‘story’ are contested concepts (Stein & Policastro, 1984). There is a wide range of terms that are used virtually interchangeably,

including story, myth, anecdote, saga, tale, account and so on. As Myrziades (1987: 85) argues: “the notion of what constitutes a myth as opposed to a story is mired in disagreement”. The definitions for each term are subject to multiple and competing versions, and the boundaries between each are unclear. This study will use the terms ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ interchangeably throughout, to cover all these related concepts.

While precise agreement on definition remains elusive, there is considerable common ground over the typical structural features of a story<sup>1</sup>, as summarised by Ricoeur (1984: 150):

“A story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary. These people are presented either in situations that change or as reacting to such change. In turn, these changes reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the people involved, and engender a new predicament, which calls for thought, action or both. This response to the new situation leads the story towards its conclusion.”

Defining narratives in this way draws attention to plot, sequencing of events, characters, their relationships, as well as to some form of purpose – often the resolution of a ‘predicament’. The focus on the features of a story has been described as a ‘structuralist’ approach (Barry & Elmes, 1997: 431). Other scholars have sought to distinguish between forms of narrative, taking a ‘communication’ perspective, where “readership and interpretation are as important as structure and authorship” (Barry & Elmes, 1997: 431). The

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<sup>1</sup> Many similar views have been expressed by scholars, for example:

“A prototypical story identifies a protagonist, a predicament, attempts to resolve the predicament, the outcomes of such attempts and the reactions of the protagonists to the situation. Causal relationships among each of the story elements are also explicitly identified in the prototype” (Robinson & Haupe, 1986: 112);

“Gergen (1999), for example, states that intelligible narratives have a number of characteristics which lend coherence: a valued endpoint or goal; relevant causally linked events ordered in a linear, temporal sequence; demarcation signs (the beginning and ending of the story); and characters with stable, coherent identities”. (Cunliffe et al., 2004: 263);

“A story is a symbolized account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension. The story has a beginning, middle and ending. The story is held together by recognizable patterns of events called plots. Central to the plot structure are human predicaments and attempted resolutions” (Sarbin, 1986b: 3)

attention to the meaning of the narrative is developed by Czarniawska (1999: 15) who asserts: “a story without a point is meaningless ... a story that just tells its point is not a story at all”. She argues that stories exist to serve an organizational purpose, suggesting that stories “begin when someone has an idea and wants to realise it, or the other way around” (Czarniawska, 1999: 79). Another approach to categorising “tales of the field” (Van Maanen, 1988) organises narratives, based on their meaning, into stories, serials and themes (Mandler, 1984). Within these definitions, the existence of a plot, which solves a problem through “causally related episodes” (Czarniawska, 1997: 78), distinguishes stories from themes and serials, where scenes are thematically or temporarily related respectively (Czarniawska, 1997: 79).

Boje (2001: 1) has attempted to draw a distinction between ‘story’ and ‘narrative’, stating that a “story is an account of incidents or events, but narrative comes after and adds ‘plot’ and ‘coherence’ to the storyline”. Boje highlights the often tentative and incomplete nature of stories, and acts of translation that take place in forming a coherent narrative “on otherwise fragmented and multi-layered experiences of desire” (Boje, 2001: 2), making narrative “a retrospective explanation of storytelling’s speculative appreciations” (Boje, 2001: 3). To distinguish this form of dialogue “before it becomes reified into the story” (Boje, 2001: 4), he introduces the concept of antenarrative, which gives further “attention to the speculative, the ambiguity of sensemaking and guessing as to what is happening in the flows of experience” (Boje, 2001: 3). This distinction highlights the difference between the underlying ‘stories’, “independent of their manifestation” (Boje, 2001: 6), and the telling or performance - the discursive presentation or narration of events (Culler, 1981: 169). However, it is unclear how a story can be conceived as independent from discourse, “as texts of experience, stories, are not complete prior to their telling but are assembled to meet situated interpretive demands” (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998: 165). The importance of performance is further highlighted by Gabriel (1995: 496), who describes the many versions of a story that co-exist: “rarely coming into direct conflict or



competition pursuing errant careers within the unmanaged spaces of organizations". With many versions, it is not the accuracy of stories and storytelling that concern members of the organization or researchers, but their apparent ability to have some form of plausible relationship to organizational 'reality'. Maines (1993: 28) argues: "the narrative mode is concerned with verisimilitude and probability"; or as Gergen (2004: 270) succinctly states: "narratives are more than, less than or other than 'what really happened'".

Most definitions of narrative have time (sequencing) and plot (storyline) at their core, giving stories their utility in making sense of experience, with plot acting to pull together "goals, cause and effect, initiatives and actions, and intended and unintended consequences" (Cunliffe et al., 2004: 264). Sensemaking and storytelling are both retrospective activities - "stories are lived before they are told, except in the case of fiction" (MacIntyre, 1981: 197) - with emplotment (Ricoeur, 1984) organizing the continuous flux of experience into describable sequences with beginnings, middles and ends. It is this sequencing that gives the story its power, rather than the truth or accuracy of its content. As Tsoukas and Hatch (2001: 1004) argue: "narrative is factually indifferent but temporally sensitive." In making sense of experience, stories do not only act to summarise the past (O'Connor 1999), but also "offer a way to invent the future and to re-narrate organizational life" (Cunliffe, 1995: 265). As a consequence of the synchronic nature of narrative, the "meaning of events depends on the locality, the prior sequence of stories" (Boje, 2001:4). For TwoTrees (1997) stories must be re-contextualised back to their time, place and mind, and for Czarniawska (1997: 23) 'a good narrative' is "valid only for a given place and time". Therefore, a particular story exists only momentarily in a specific set of circumstances, as every story "since it is embedded in changing meaning contexts of multiple stories and collective story making, 'self-destructs' with each telling" (Boje, 2001: 18). The sensitivity to context can be broadened further to the use of language generally, as Alvesson and Kärreman (2000: 141) argue against "a conventional view of language as a transparent medium for the transport of meaning, critics

have emphasised its ambiguous, metaphorical, context-dependent and active nature”.

Stories sit within broader genres of narratives, which “are habits that have built up over time to interpret and evaluate the world” (Rhodes, 2001: 7). Genre has more than one role: in sensemaking genres “seem to provide both writer and reader with commodious and conventional ‘models’ for limiting the hermeneutic task of making sense of human happenings” (Bruner, 1991: 14); and in achieving power because genres “are accepted ways of writing, they can also be seen as particular ways that authority is achieved” (Rhodes, 2001: 6). Scholars (e.g. Jeffcutt, 1993, 1994; Beech, 2000) have identified a range of narrative types prevalent in organizational stories. These include epic, tragic, romantic, ironic, comedic and satirical. Some researchers support the view of Campbell (1956) that:

“there is basically one story in Western culture, the monomyth, which is the framework for all stories. The story is of a hero ... on a quest ... as he confronts various challenges ... he is changed. He becomes wiser, more powerful and more spiritual” (Gergen, 2004: 271).

Others see “that in complex, internally differentiated organizations separate groups will tend to evolve distinct understandings” (Brown & Humphreys, 2003: 135), understandings that may be associated with particular narrative types. These genres add a further layer of complexity to the definitions of narrative, and research in this field has developed “as a fluid, dynamic, yet rigorous process open to the interpretations (negotiated) of its many participants (polyphonic) and situated in the context and point of enactment (synchronic)” (Cunliffe et al, 2004: 261).

### **2.3 SENSEMAKING AND COMPLEXITY**

This study focuses on how sense is made of the complexity of organizational change. As Brown and Humphreys (2003: 123) assert, “people’s ability to sense make is most tested when they encounter events they consider to be extraordinary and implausible.” This section examines sensemaking, its

relationship with complexity, and how both of these concepts impact organizational change. Weick identifies seven properties<sup>2</sup> of sensemaking (Weick, 1995: 17) and asserts:

“sensemaking is about such things as placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning” (Weick, 1995: 6).

Weick (1995: 6) argues sensemaking “is grounded in both individual and social activity”, a theme elaborated by Bruner (1991: 3), who considers an individual’s ‘working intelligence’ to include: “his or her reference books, notes, computer programs and data bases, or most important of all, the network of friends, colleagues, or mentors on whom one leans for help and advice”. Sensemaking is described as a dynamic, fluid and ongoing process (Weick, 1995: 17) that never reaches a final definitive conclusion (Bakhtin, 1986), “since the dialogues construct plurivocal meanings and interpretations” (Boje, 1995), and “more sensemaking keeps displacing closure” (Boje, 2001: 3). A narrative structure provides a practical device for making sense as “people understand complex events in ways that are integrated and temporally coherent” (Rhodes & Brown, 2005: 3). As a consequence, stories form part of our daily ‘interpretative struggle’ (Boje, 1991b) as we live out our lives. This interpretation involves the assigning of meaning to everyday activities, as “human beings are ready to make use of plots to give meaning to meaningless movements” (Sarbin, 1986b: 14). Czarniawska (1997: 14) sees this sensemaking activity serving a basic human purpose, asserting in “order to understand our own lives we put them in narrative form and we do the same to understand the lives of other people”. Not only is the structure of narrative

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<sup>2</sup> Weick’s (1995: 17) seven properties of sensemaking are listed as:

1. Grounded in identity construction
2. Retrospective
3. Enactive of sensible environments
4. Social
5. Ongoing
6. Focused on and by extracted cues
7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

important, so is its performance, emphasising again the social quality of sensemaking (Salzer-Morling, 1998: 116; Boje 1995: 1000).

The narrative approach is particularly suited to making sense of complex events and, as Brown and Humphreys (2003: 123) assert: “some of the most difficult and complex of these events occur during processes of radical change”. Tsoukas and Hatch (2001: 981) conclude that: “the developing logic of complexity theory itself is entirely compatible with an interpretive and in our case a narrative, approach”. Complexity is not an absolute quality of a system, or situation, “because the system cannot speak for itself, you do not know what the system really is” (Rorty, 1989). Complexity is defined by whoever is describing the situation - that is “system complexity is a contingent property arising out of the interaction *I* between a system *S* and an observer/decision-maker *O*” (Casti, 1986: 149). The labelling of a system as complex is, therefore, a function of the way in which it is described by the observer. Without sufficiently complex language, or narrative, a system cannot be interpreted as complex, (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 986), and complicating the language of description allows the complexity of a situation to be explored. Tsoukas and Hatch (2001: 986) argue that this has been happening in organization science, through the focus on interpretive approaches, citing as examples: reflexivity (e.g. Chia, 1996; Cooper & Burrell, 1988); narrativity (e.g. Van Maanen, 1988; Weick & Browning, 1986); and paradox, ambiguity and contradiction (e.g. Putnam, 1985; Quinn & Cameron, 1988; Westenholtz, 1993). As Boje et al. assert:

“rather than respond to the turbulence of the environment directly, organizations often enact a simpler environment of rules and rituals for reaching their decisions” (Boje et al., 1982: 21).

Interpretive approaches, and narrative in particular, introduce a complexity of language matched to the complexity of the environment, allowing a deeper understanding of the situation to be reached. As Tsoukas and Hatch (2001: 994) put it “one cannot understand why a system is at point C without understanding how it came to be there ... in short, it needs a story with a plot”.

The importance of narrative order during organizational change derives from the ability of storylines to “reduce the randomness and chaos of everyday life” (O’Connor, 1997: 396), drawing causality out of the chaotic and disorganised (Cooper, 1990). In achieving this simplification, or reduction of complexity, stories act as “explanatory myths, qualitative simplifications, conceptual constructions, and perceptual themes that interpret and frame organizations and characters” (Boje, 1995). To achieve this interpretive role, stories provide organizational intelligence (Brown, 1990; Kreps, 1990; Weick, 1979) and, in doing so, “reduce the equivocality (complexity, ambiguity, unpredictability) of organizational life, helping organizational actors interpret and respond to equivocal situations” (Brown and Kreps, 1993: 48). The application of this narrative order during sensemaking is an interpretive act, as experience itself does not have narrative form; “it is in reflecting on experience that we construct stories” (Robinson & Haupe, 1986: 111). This retrospective sensemaking activity (Weick, 1995) “consists of creating a fit between a situation and the story schema” (Robinson & Haupe, 1986: 111), a process requiring the sense-maker to apply skill and judgement. The resulting narratives are a version of ‘reality’ “whose acceptability is governed by convention and ‘narrative necessity’ rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness” (Bruner, 1991: 4-5). A story also invites a particular type of response, encouraging engagement with its meaning (Reason & Hawkins 1988) and “not to challenge ‘the facts’” (Gabriel, 1995: 480-481), allowing significant latitude in the ‘accuracy’ or ‘truth’<sup>3</sup> of the information drawn on during sensemaking. This flexibility of content in stories allows for complex events to be interpreted by “the blending of what is known about a situation (facts) with relevant conjectures (imagination)” (Sarbin, 1986a: xii), as long as the resulting formulation “meets one or more tests of coherence”, (Sarbin,

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<sup>3</sup> Making sense is “a negotiated, synchronic process because narrative performance and understanding are situated in many moments of time and context” (Cunliffe et al., 2004: 273) therefore the process is not about discovering the truth, as the truth is re-conceptualized as something constructed rather than discovered (Jacobson & Jacques, 1997) – “but one truth story amongst many others” (Rhodes, 2001: 9).

1986b: 12).<sup>4</sup> Whatever is drawn upon, it is the pulling together of information<sup>5</sup> that aids sensemaking, with the narrative acting “as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole” (Polkinghorne, 1988: 36), which involves “providing or invoking a context for meaning making” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 998).

## **2.4 POWER AND POLITICS**

Organization, almost by definition, focuses on the bringing together of constituencies, however as “much as organizations can be characterised by homogeneity, consensus and integration, they can also be characterised by heterogeneity, conflict and differentiation” (Salzer-Morling 1998: 114). This conflict comes to the fore during times of change, as differences as to the way forward seek resolution. This resolution highlights the power relations between organizational members, and their resulting political behaviour. As each organizational story “incorporates the feelings, goals, needs and values of the people who create it” (Robinson & Haupe, 1986: 115), a narrative approach provides an appropriate lens to view power and politics. As our “language cannot be separated from our goals and beliefs” (Taylor, 1985) the examination of narrative, which “is infused with motive” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 1002), gives access to the personal interest of storytellers. In an analysis of one type of major change, mergers and acquisitions, Vaara (2002: 238) argued: “the narrators, in general, used the narratives to justify and legitimise their own actions”. That is stories were used to exert power. The defensive use of power and storytelling is emphasised by Buttny (1993: 16) who asserts individuals “re-present past events in such a way to defend their conduct”. Not all stories have the same influence, as Boje (1995) argues “some

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<sup>4</sup> This creative sensemaking is further supported by Gabriel (1995: 483) who asserts “storytellers neither accept nor reject ‘reality’. Instead they seek to mould it, shape it and infuse it with meaning, each in a distinct and individual way.”

<sup>5</sup> The information pulled together has an emotional as well as factual bias, so the telling of stories leads to “highly charged narratives, not merely recounting ‘events’, but enriching them, enhancing them and infusing them with meaning” (Gabriel, 1995: 480).

discourses are more hegemonic than others and thus marginalise the other discourses". Equally while everyone in the organization has a voice (Rhodes, 2001: 23) "some voices are louder, more articulate and more powerful than others" (Hazen, 1993: 16), and some have powerful advantages to manipulate others through discourse (Reed, 2000) and have their stories stick<sup>6</sup> (White, 1987: 167). From a constructionist standpoint, this power to shape the dominant narratives within an organization is the power to define the 'reality' as perceived by members. Rhodes (2001: 9) draws attention not only to the crisis of representation, but "to the politics of representation in terms of who gets to play a part in the constitution of meaning"<sup>7</sup>.

It is not only individuals who seek to exercise power through storytelling, Rhodes (2001: 22) identifies groups using myths and stories "as ways to legitimate privileged power relations as coalitions of participants attempt to instil acceptable and plausible explanations which preserve their interests". Wilkins (1983: 83) extends this perspective by arguing: "most of the functions which have been attributed to narratives like myths, sagas or stories have to do with the maintenance of social order". Power is used by the management of organizations to maintain control, and narrative "is a singularly potent discursive form through which control can be dramatised, because it compels belief while at the same time it shields truth claims from testing and debate", (Witten, 1993: 100). Boje (1995) asserts: "control over interpretive ambiguity is often manipulated to support the interests of management". Thus power is exerted by influencing how events, or more accurately the stories about events, are understood. Gabriel (1995: 482) recognises this 'official' discourse, but highlights the dialogue carried out in what he terms the unmanaged organization, arguing there: "is little doubt that all organizational members are

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<sup>6</sup> Conversely it may be those who are able to have their stories stick who gain power, as "power is really the power to define" (Brown, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> The powerful are able to define reality and at the same time receive credibility from it as the appearance of being true or the verisimilitude of a story "imparts credibility to the narrative, the narrator and the narrative act, but also provides experience with authenticity (Fisher, 1987)".

routinely engaged in this discourse [of the managed organization]. This, however, is not the only discourse in which they are engaged.”<sup>8</sup> For Gabriel (1995: 477) this discourse outside the management story plays an important role:

“within every organization there is a terrain which is not and cannot be managed, in which people, both individually and in groups, can engage in unsupervised, spontaneous activity.”

According to Jones (1991), one purpose of creating stories that counter an organizational culture is to relieve stress. Equally, it is out of this diversity of storytelling that the culture of an organization emerges as “it is this very context sensitivity that makes narrative discourse in everyday life such a viable instrument for cultural negotiation” (Bruner, 1991: 17). This cultural negotiation takes place because organization members do not simply receive the official story, but “frequently discover unexpected meanings or invite into the text what was intendedly unrelated or excluded” (Gabriel, 1995: 484). Thus, while narrative allows the exercise of power, it is also a political vehicle through which interpretations and meanings are negotiated. As Gabriel (1995: 489) contends, the “boundaries between managed and unmanaged organization are rarely rigid”. The act of interpretation is a political one, as by “accepting an interpretation, one inevitably has to take sides” (Gabriel, 1991: 864), and, as Myrsiades (1987: 113) asserts: “in the higher levels of organization where tasks are more ambiguous and politics pervade the organization’s culture, the insight provided by stories into patterns of belief and behaviour can prove critical.”

## **2.5 IDENTITY AND CULTURE**

Organizational identity has been defined as what is central, distinctive and enduring about an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). This study takes

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<sup>8</sup> Other scholars have supported the existence of voices other than the management monologue. Salzer-Morling (1998: 113) identified that although “managerial monologues are often loud and dominant ... alternative stories are told everywhere, all the time”; Boje (1995) contrasts the “official discourse” with the “many marginalized discourses in every organization” (Boje, 1995: 1022). In his case study of Disney, he sees these voices as marginalised as the “knowledge constructed in the official Disney stories is an act of domination” (Boje, 1995: 1012).



the perspective that organizational and individual identities are created within discourse, which “provide social actors with important symbolic resources for identity negotiation” (Read & Bartkowski, 2000: 398). There is a strong relationship between sensemaking and identity construction, so in making sense of the impact of change, individuals may well be required to examine and potentially alter their identities. Weick (1995: 17) begins his description of sensemaking with a discussion of how it is grounded in identity construction, and continues by describing the intertwined process of making sense of the world and understanding the self, asserting that:

“once I know who I am I know what is out there. But the direction of causality flows just as often from the situation to a definition of self as it does the other way” (Weick, 1995: 20).<sup>9</sup>

From a social constructionist perspective, culture and individual identity are closely linked as self “must be treated as a construction that, so to speak, proceeds from the outside in as well as from the inside out, from culture to mind as well as mind to culture” (Bruner, 1990: 108).

Narrative is an important vehicle for this relationship between culture and identity, as “individuals are constituted by multiple and ongoing story lines, both private and public” (O’Connor, 1997: 396) and the “individual identity ... is thus to be found in an ability to account for one’s actions in terms that will be accepted by the audience” (Czarniawska, 1997: 46). Sarbin (1986b: 17) identifies a number of sources for the creation of identity in addition to reading, including the “imaginings stirred by orally told tales or by direct or vicarious witnessing of the actions of role models”. Czarniawska (1997: 44) focuses on the role of plot in identity creation and highlights the dynamic nature of identity, in stating how we “create ourselves by projecting our identities against accessible plots, as it were, but every performance changes, augments, distorts or enriches the existing repertoire”. The focus on identity

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<sup>9</sup> Barrett et al. (1995: 353) make a similar point when they argue that “instead of seeing meaning centred in the individual’s head, we should view meaning as occurring in our relatedness with one another”.

is particularly important as “the kind of story a person generally tells about some period in his or her life can have dramatic consequences for that person’s well-being” (Gergen, 2004: 270).

Czarniawska (1999: 24) argues that organizations “need a coherent narrative just as humans do” and organizational change not only challenges individual identity, but collective meaning too. Narrative enables us to gain insight into collective meaning, as Freeman claims:

“in addition to serving as vehicles for understanding the unique trajectories of individuals’ lives, they [narratives] also serve as means of access to social reality, signifying the worlds through which people have moved” (Freeman, 2004: 69).

Stories are a means to understand culture, Sarbin (1986b: 14) argues: “there is no way to give us an understanding of any society including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources”. To gain this understanding, stories “act as guides” (Myrsiades, 1987: 104) through the social and psychological processes that constitute culture. Examining narrative also brings insight into the relationship members have with their organization. Stories are used by members to express their understanding and commitment to the organization (Brown, 1982: 125), and “the degree of member familiarity with the dominant story of the organization might indicate the member’s level of adaptation to the organization” (Boyce, 1996: 6).

Stories also play their part in creating organizational culture as “narratives do accrue, and, as anthropologists insist, the accruals eventually create something variously called a ‘culture’ or a ‘history’ or, more loosely, a ‘tradition’” (Bruner, 1991:18). This is a view supported by Boyce (1995: 107), who argues that “storytelling is an effective form of communication for the construction of a collective sense and for connection with deep meaning”. This collective deep meaning may take the form of organizational values, which can be unobtrusively and persuasively communicated through narrative (Witten, 1993: 109). Boje (1991a: 106) draws the link between individual

sensemaking and the creation of collective memory, by defining the storytelling organization as a “collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sense-making and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory”, further establishing the strong links between culture and identity. Boje (1995) highlights this relationship as a “constant struggle over getting the stories of insiders and outsiders straight” and is supported by Eisenberg and Goodall (1993: 137) who argue: “an organizational culture is necessarily a conflicted environment, a site of multiple meanings engaged in a constant struggle for interpretive control”. This emphasis on “struggle” from both sources focuses our attention back on issues of power. As Rhodes (2001: 22) contends: “power and control are used to achieve the consensual ‘shared meaning’ so central to cultural approaches to organizations”.

## **2.6 ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

This section sets the context for the subsequent section on narrative and change, by covering the main themes in the field of organizational change that have been developed through the history of the topic, and positions narrative as integral to discursive approaches to change. For a phenomenon that “is central to and pervades management researchers’ thinking on organizations” (Ford & Ford, 1994: 756) organizational change is an elusive subject to review. As Mills (2003: 81) identifies: “prior to 1980, within business texts, organizational change as a management technique was either not mentioned at all or was limited to discussion of group dynamics or employee resistance to change.” Prior to the 1980s, there were two main streams of literature, Organizational Development (OD) and Organizational Theory (OT), (Mohrman et al., 1989: 4). OD can trace its history to the studies completed in the Hawthorne plant of Western Electric Company in the 1920s and 1930s (Smither, et al., 1996: 9). OD evolved through the work of Kurt Lewin at the Research Center for Group Dynamics during the 1950s and 1960s, where the emphasis was on communications and relations between group members – most notably through T-groups (French & Bell, 1984). This was a period where

OD “showed special competence in using applied behavioural science” (Aaltio-Marjosola, 1994: 56). The work of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations broadened the focus of OD, with research programmes such as ‘the longwall method of coal-getting’, to a socio-technical systems approach, which considered the interplay between social and technical systems within organizations. During the 1970s, in parallel with the development in qualitative methods, OD became tools and technology-driven (Smircich, 1983).

OD has been criticised (Mohrman et al., 1989: 9) for being too ‘micro’ in its orientation to provide insight into organizational level change, concerning itself with the practical implications of specific interventions. In contrast, Mohrman et al. (1989: 4) consider OT too ‘macro’ focusing on environmental interfaces and groups of organizations, with limited concern for the practical implications of research. Newman and Nollen (1998: 44) identify five noteworthy OT approaches: transaction costs theory (Williamson, 1985, 1993); the contingency view (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1969; Woodward, 1965); resource dependence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978); life cycle (Greiner, 1972; Kimberley & Miles, 1980); and finally strategic choice (Child, 1972). In tracing the development of OT, Hatch (1997) draws attention to major perspectives on organizations – classic, modern, symbolic-interpretive (including the social construction of reality theory (Berger & Luckman, 1966)) and postmodern – which have shaped thinking in OT during particular periods. She suggests these help make sense of the diversity of current approaches, especially as in “organization theory, perspectives accumulate, and over time influence one another” (Hatch, 1997:4).

Demers (2007) also reflected on this diversity of perspective in her comprehensive synthesis of the scholarly literature on organizational change. She details the variety and richness of the field, while demonstrating how it has developed “through a process of sedimentation where earlier theories continue to coexist with more recent approaches” (Demers, 2007: xiv). Taking an historical perspective, Demers identifies three major periods, with the first

beginning after World War II emphasising growth and adaptation, when development was “usually interpreted by people in organizations as indicating innovation, growing capability and increased size” (Child & Kieser, 1981: 28). The early years of this period were characterised by three bodies of work, firstly rational adaptation focused on voluntaristic explanations (e.g. Penrose, 1952; Thompson, 1967; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), while the second, organic adaptation, took a more emergent view (e.g. Cyert & March, 1963; Selnick, 1957). Finally the third group of scholars in the growth and adaptation period develop life-cycle models (e.g. Greiner, 1972; Stopford & Wells, 1972). In the late 1970s scholars began to question adaptation as the main force in organizational change, shifting their focus to the environment as the primary cause of change (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997). Two perspectives stood out as questioning basic assumptions: population ecology (e.g. Aldrich, 1979; Hannan & Freeman, 1977) and neo-institutional theory (e.g. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The resulting views of organization in this post-war period ranged from:

“visions of organizations as flexible, technical tools in the hands of omniscient managers, designed to pursue predetermined goals or react to environmental constraints, to living organisms that evolve through prescribed stages, to non-rational social systems changing through drift (because of politics in old institutionalism) or imitation (in search of legitimacy in new institutionalism) or inertial entities selected by the environment” (Demers, 2007: 40).

The second period, identified by Demers in her historical review, started at the beginning of the 1980's and was concerned with organizational transformation, with change seen as more of a disruption or discontinuity than the adaptation of the preceding era. Four distinct approaches were identifiable: *configurational*, focused on organizational typologies (Mintzberg, 1973); *cognitive*, considered the reframing of top management's cognitive schemes (e.g. Barr et al., 1992; Sheldon, 1980) or the meaning-creation processes required for change (e.g. Bartunek, 1984; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991); *cultural*, where culture was required to be aligned with strategy and structure (e.g. Schwartz & Davis, 1980; Tichy, 1982) or seen as resulting from an

organization's history and impossible for managers to control (Barley et al., 1988) and, finally, a *political* approach, in which change was portrayed as a dialectical process, with competing divergent interests (e.g. Hardy, 1995; Pettigrew, 1985a).

Within each of these perspectives, scholars typically approached change from either a revolutionary or from an evolutionary perspective. The revolutionary perspective was underpinned by a managerial point of view, with organizations perceived as whole entities that needed to be realigned to a shift in environment, typically through simultaneous managerial intervention on strategy, structure and culture. While in contrast other authors (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977; Meyerson & Martin, 1987) called attention to the lack of concern for implementation issues and questioned the capability of top management to exercise control over this style of transformational change. Underpinning these differing perspectives was a growing distinction between change as a transition deliberately instituted by management, to move their organization to a new equilibrium, and an emergent, incremental, socially constructed process shared by all organization members.

These characterisations of episodic and continuous change were carried through into the third period identified by Demers, into which there was a gradual passage during the 1990s. The process view of change began to take centre stage, with research examining “the dynamics of changing” (Pettigrew, 1985b: 272); and organizational transformation, defined as long-term, never-ending, indeterminate renewal through learning and innovation. Rather than organizations adapting to their environment, in this period the idea of co-evolution of organization and environment became prevalent. Underneath this potentially unifying banner, there was a diversity of perspectives.

Demers groups three approaches under the natural evolution perspective: *behavioural learning*, where organizations retain trial and error learning in routines (e.g. Holmqvist, 2003); *evolutionary*, that is change caused through

innovation (e.g. Winter, 1990) and *complexity*, where as a complex system organizations display chaotic behaviour leading to the unpredictable emergence of innovation. These natural evolution perspectives share a focus on the 'natural' rather than 'intentional' change (McKelvey, 1997), whereas within the social dynamics perspective, the final categorisation offered by Demers, the meaning and implications of change and continuity is far more contested (Sturdy & Grey, 2003). Taking a radical and postmodern approach, scholars have highlighted the issues of power and control with change in organizations reinforcing the existing oppressive social order (Knights & Willmott, 2000). In contrast, other research has taken a discursive approach with change as a “discursively constituted object” (Grant, Michelson, Oswick & Wailes, 2005) and organizations are continuously recreated through discursive processes, such as narrating (e.g. Boje, 1991; Chreim, 2005; Czarniawska, 1997; Doolin, 2003; O'Connor, 1995, 2000; Skoldberg, 1994).

It is this last perspective of organizational change that I have taken for this thesis. Since the 1980s, in line with the linguistic turn in social science, the introduction of a discursive approach to change has been a key development. Morgan and Sturdy (2000) distinguish three main approaches to studying organizational change - firstly managerialist, which “offers prescriptive techniques for managers to engineer change” (Doolin, 2003: 753); secondly processual, which focuses on the dynamics of change; and finally discursive. In considering research into organizational change, Mills (2003: 2) asserts: “what has been missing from the debate so far is what actually happens when management adopts and applies a popular change programme, and what can be learnt from this”. Approaches that take a discursive perspective are well positioned to take on this challenge, with a method of analysis which maintains the complexities of the interactions between organizational members during change, allowing the exploration of “content, context and process” (Pettigrew, 1987: 6). Heracleous and Barrett (2001: 756) identify three approaches to discourse - functional, interpretive and critical – as well as proposing a structurational approach as a fourth, all of which have

implications for the dominant theory of change associated with each approach.

For all discursive approaches, organizational change is seen as constructing, and sharing, new meanings and interpretations of organizational activities (Morgan & Sturdy, 2000), a perspective distinct from the approach taken in much previous research. Tsoukas (2005: 96) considers this prior work to fall into one of two broad categories, behaviourist or cognitivist, and summarises the behaviourist perspective as:

“change is modelled on motion and is, thus episodic – it occurs in successive states ... The forces through which change is effected are, typically, managerial requests, orders and commands (rewards and punishments), stemming from the authority relationship managers possess in organizational hierarchies.” (Tsoukas, 2005: 96)

Within the cognitivist perspective, the focus is on changing minds, from which different behaviours will follow (Gardner, 2004), rather than directly shaping behaviour, as in the behaviourist approach. Again Tsoukas (2005: 97) summarises, whereas:

“behaviourists seek to change human behaviour through reinforcements - rewards and punishments – cognitivists want to intervene into how people think. Again change is seen as primarily episodic, and knowledge regarding how change may be effected is a function of the accuracy of representations of individuals’ interconnected cognitive maps”.

As Grant et al. (2005: 6) argue: “this turn to discourse is, in part, driven by a growing disillusionment with more mainstream theories and approaches to the study of change”. One particular concern, with the behaviourist and cognitivist perspectives, is they both describe change in the language of stasis and equilibrium (Chia, 1999: 209) and, as Chia (1999: 209) argues: “we are not good at thinking *movement*”. From within a discursive frame of reference, researchers have seen change variously as: a story of stories (Sköldbberg, 1994); a polyphonic phenomenon (Hazen, 1993); or something within which conversations are introduced, maintained and deleted (Albert, 1983, 1984; Czarniawska, 1997). Grant et al. (2004:3) characterise “four domains that are



particularly prevalent in the studies of organizational discourse: conversation and dialogue, narratives and stories, rhetoric and tropes”.

It is from within the first of these, conversation and dialogue, that Ford and Ford (1995: 542) describe that: “the change process actually occurs within and is driven by communication rather than the reverse”, as the process of communication sustains and modifies new realities (Ford & Backoff, 1988). From this perspective, making change happen in an organization involves creating “the conversational realities that produce effective action rather than to align organizations with some ‘true’ reality” (Ford, 1999: 480); or as Barrett et al. (1995: 366) propose change “occurs when a new way of talking replaces an old way of talking”.

Not all researchers taking an interpretive perspective dismiss the idea of episodes during change. Isabella (1990: 14) argues that “the interpretations of key events evolve through a series of stages – anticipation, confirmation, culmination and aftermath”, a model which builds on the sequence of unfreezing, moving and refreezing (Lewin, 1947). Similarly, Ford and Ford (1995: 552) propose that the change process is constituted by four types of conversations: 1) initiative; 2) understanding; 3) performance; and 4) closure, though describe a fluid movement between the stages with “any one of the four types of conversation can shift to any other three types” (Ford & Ford, 1995: 552). Weber and Manning (2001: 240) reflect a similar fluidity within their approach which, “depicts individual sensemaking as a continuous process: As new information is encountered, participants are constantly interpreting the new data.” However, Chia (1999: 210) contests this, asserting: “typologies, taxonomies and classification schemas are convenient but essentially reductionistic methods for abstracting, fixing and labelling what is an intrinsically changing, fluxing and transforming reality”.

## **2.7 NARRATIVE AND CHANGE**

### **2.7.1 Making Sense of Organizational Change**

A number of researchers have expressed their dissatisfaction with how existing approaches cope with the complexities of change (Abbott, 1988; Van der Ven & Poole, 1995). For example, Cairns and Beech (2003: 178) argue that: “within much of the managerial literature there is a tendency towards a rejection of complexity and towards the establishment of singular conceptions of reality within a unified macro-level structure”. Other scholars recognise “multiple perspectives provide a more comprehensive understanding of organizational change” (Doolin, 2003: 766), a point of view which may act against “a primary task of management ... to construct a discourse of corporate coherence” (Araujo & Easton, 1996: 371). Furthermore, “reducing organizational change to an abstract series of steps removes the actor from the process” (Stevenson & Greenberg, 1998: 741). A narrative approach to change seeks to address these concerns, by maintaining the context and complexities of change and placing the ‘actor’ central to the ‘story’.

During change people “seek to construct a narrative that will enable organization actors themselves to make sense of, and cope with complexity and ambiguity” (Cairns & Beech, 2003: 179). The process of sensemaking during change is ongoing, as organization members interpret events as they unfold, and judge the personal implications. This individual process cannot be controlled by the management of the organization, but “they can seek to have a major influence on the interpretations that are arrived at by presenting their own construction of events” (Dunford & Jones, 2000: 1208). This has been referred to as ‘sensegiving’ (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and during the early stages of change is critical for outside actors, as well as organization members (Rouleau, 2005: 1413). Managers play an important role in the interpretation of events to support members’ sensemaking throughout change (Dunford & Jones, 2000: 1222), though their insight is not exclusive, as Chreim (2005: 573) argues: “management’s narrative is one of multiple claims that can be made about an organization”.

Some researchers have focused on the similarities of perceptions of individuals during change (Isabella, 1990), while others have suggested differences by organizational function or level (Dearborn & Simon, 1958; Ireland, et al., 1987). Hierarchical position influences the nature of managerial involvement in strategic change, as middle managers “do not share the same level of consciousness of corporate strategy as top managers” (Rouleau, 2005: 1416) and “strategise by enacting a set of micro-practices that are produced in each routine and conversation surrounding the change” (Rouleau, 2005: 1431). Strategic change is thus ‘implemented’ as it connects with the daily practices of middle managers and other organization members, highlighting the active role of all the organization’s actors in producing change (Cairns & Beech, 2003: 180). As a situation changes, a new story replaces the existing one, in order to make sense of the new circumstances (Morgan, 1993). Therefore, narratives have been considered “a kind of code that transforms uncertain change into something meaningful and comprehensive” (Reissner, 2005: 483).

The themes of individual sensemaking and organizational change are closely related, as Weber and Manning (2001: 228) contend: “how organization members acquire, organize and make sense of changes in the environment is a key to understanding organizational change”. Hazen (1994: 72) goes further in linking the individual and organization by asserting: “organizational change occurs simultaneously in our selves and in our organizations”. The nature of this sensemaking during change has been found to be affected by the quantity of ‘raw material’ available (i.e., more data for sensemaking) (Thomas & McDaniel, 1990; Dutton, 1992), and direct, and indirect, experiences of organization members (Mead, 1934; Weick, 1979). Embracing the multiple, and often disparate, voices of individuals during change, aligns with a post-modern perspective, and may lead us not to expect “‘Grand Stories’ to cover organizational life and research” (Aaltio-Marjosola, 1994: 58). However, Aaltio-Marjosola (1994: 58) warns against assuming that organizational change projects are, therefore, increasingly focused on individual situations and

specific corporate cultures, arguing in times of rapid change “classical grand assumptions about what is ‘Ideal, Proper and Healthy’” (Aaltio-Marjosola, 1994: 66) are easily adopted. This may be driven by “a process of rationalisation in order to derive meaning that suits the expedient needs of those who hold power in the particular context of interpretation and action” (Cairns & Beech, 2003: 179), as those in power attempt to achieve ‘corporate coherence’ at a time when “understandings are often disparate and fluid rather than discursively monolithic” (Brown et al., 2005: 313).

The corporate desire for coherence, during times of disparate understandings, is also reflected in the search for corporate and individual identity during change. Chreim (2005: 570) describes identity as a reflexive project “that consists of sustaining continuously revised biographical narratives that must integrate events occurring in the external world into the ongoing story”. For Chreim, this struggle never reaches a stable conclusion as “the texts that constitute it [identity] remain open to multiple readings and to subsequent re-writing that continually destabilise it” (Chreim, 2005: 567). The identities of organizations remain indeterminate, as they are constituted by continuously evolving shared narratives (Brown et al., 2005: 313). While inconclusive, these identity narratives serve an important purpose for management, inculcating “in employees a set of assumptions and associated work practices that served the ends prescribed by the founders” (Brown et al., 2005: 321); and for employees “in giving meaning to their experiences by ‘storying’ their working lives ... by linking their personal identity narratives with those of the organization” (Brown et al., 2005: 321), thereby supporting employees’ self-esteem (Brockner, 1988).

Examining identity, in the context of change, leads to the discussion of resistance to change, as “radical change is threatening not only because it effects people’s self-esteem” (Fiol & O’Connor, 2002: 532), but also, and maybe more importantly, because it disrupts people’s need for identity consistency and continuity. This is significant, for the initiation of change, as

“people are not, of their own volition, likely to instigate or initiate a process that fundamentally threatens their own self-definitions” (Fiol & O’Connor, 2002: 537). Ford (1999: 495) relates this resistance to shifts in language, stating: “language shifts ... may seem tantamount to shifting one’s identity and resisted to maintain that identity”. Weber and Manning (2001: 229) consider resistance an act of self-defence, for organization members to gain time to interpret, and understand, changes in their environment, so that they may allay anxiety, resolve conflicts and reduce ambiguity (Brown & Starkey, 2000; Dubrin & Ireland, 1993; Gemmil & Smith, 1985; Zander, 1950). Furthermore, this resistance can be heated as “identities are held together by emotions as well as cognitive understandings of self” (Fiol & O’Connor, 2002: 535). Counter-stories that go against the prevailing management ‘grand narrative’ can form the basis of resistance and opposition, as “stories can have a spoiling effect on each other, neutralising each other and destroying each other’s meaning, leading to silent incomprehension and confusion” (Gabriel, 2000: 90).

Not all researchers accept the inevitability of resistance to change, with Ford (1999: 494) suggesting ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ having a role, explaining that the “prediction of some future event that has not yet taken place, e.g. ‘people will resist change’, creates actions in the present, e.g. use of resistance reduction strategies, which in turn bring about resistance and thereby ‘prove’ the prediction.” Ford and Ford (1994: 777) argue that: “resistance is an interpretation given by an observer to a particular event or circumstance and is not, therefore, some ‘thing’ to be overcome.” Rather than acting against something, as implied by resistance, organization members may be considered as not ‘enrolled’ in the proposed change (Senge, 1990), so “are instead acting in ways that are consistent with what they *do* see as attractive” (Ford & Ford, 1994: 777). This perspective is summarised succinctly by Chia (1999: 211): “change occurs naturally and of its own volition once the invisible hand of cultural intervention is removed”.

### 2.7.2 Defining Organizational Change

In considering a definition of organizational change, it is necessary to consider the nature of what is changing. From an interpretative perspective, it is helpful to draw the distinction between first and second-order realities<sup>10</sup>. Narrative provides a means by which second-order reality is shared, and “because second-order, represented realities provide the context in which first-order realities are present, changes in second-order representations can lead to fundamental and practical changes in an organization regardless of what happens to first-order realities” (Ford, 1999: 483). Therefore, “change in organizations is, at least in part, constituted by alterations in people’s understandings, encoded in narratives, and shared in conversations”, (Brown & Humphreys, 2003: 121). The distinction between first and second-order realities can be difficult, as social events become objectified (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and “are treated as objects or objective realities rather than as constructions that are maintained in communication” (Ford & Ford, 1995: 561). People take the narrative of an event as a first-order reality, confusing the event itself with their interpretation of it (Senge, 1990). Chia (1999: 215) highlights this problem from a different angle: “it is only when portions of reality are assumed to be fixable in space-time, and are relatively unchanging, that they can adequately represented by words and concepts”.

In considering what is changing, researchers have drawn attention to the important role of what stays the same, in providing organization members with psychological anchors in times of change (Gustafson & Reger, 1995), and helping achieve legitimacy (Levitt & Nass, 1994: 242), by framing the present as consistent with the past. Continuity can provide a sense of familiarity and facilitates the acceptance of change (Pondy, 1983); while an organization’s past can be used as a source of inspiration in confronting the present

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<sup>10</sup> Ford (1999: 481) explains: “first order, presented realities refer to the physically demonstrable and publicly shared discernable characteristics, qualities or attributes of a thing, event or situation”, and he continues: “second-order presented realities are created whenever we attribute, attach or give meaning, significance, or value to a first order reality” (Ford, 1999: 482).

(O'Connor, 2000). In short: "change carries the 'liability of newness'" (Chreim, 2005: 587). McMillan and Hyde (2000: 40) argue the ability to reconcile "the old order with the new" is the "central and overriding mark of eloquence in all change oratory", although "continuity may be no more than a rhetorical construction by those attempting to promote change" (Chreim, 2005: 588).

In defining organizational change, not only must change be examined, but organization too. As well as change being typically described in terms of stasis and equilibrium, organization is commonly considered a stable social structure – rather than as a performance or effect (Doolin, 2003: 751). From a narrative perspective, organization has been considered as "a discursive space constituted through language practices, and in particular the telling and re-telling of stories, some fully drawn, others 'terse' or 'fragmentary'" (Brown et al., 2005: 312). These 'discursive spaces' which constitute organization have also been described<sup>11</sup> as "symbolic rallying points" defined by sets of "shared, mutable communicative protocols that facilitate intersubjective understanding" (Worthington, 1996: 67). Doolin (2003: 752) draws an important conclusion from this perspective on organization: "if organization is a performance, then in a fundamental sense, organization *is* change and the term 'organizational change' becomes a tautology." This perspective aligns with the earlier discussion of change as a continuous process, not a shift between fixed states, or equilibriums, as members constantly shift their shared understanding, through the telling and re-telling of organizational stories. As Reissner, (2005: 483) concludes: "change demands new learning and this expresses itself in changes in the prevailing narratives that in total constitute the culture of the organization. The learning that takes place in organizations cannot be separated from changes in their organizational culture".

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<sup>11</sup> Other descriptions include: "organization is performed in the language, practices and techniques through which people govern the conduct of themselves and their relations with other actors" (Doolin, 2003: 752); and: "organization, then, can be viewed as a set of ordering narratives that operate to generate complex social and material configurations" (Doolin, 2003: 757).

### 2.7.3 Implications for Practitioners

Taking a narrative perspective on change has an impact on the role of those wishing to influence change in organizations. The perspective would lead them to use interventions “to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct existing realities so as to bring about different performances” (Ford, 1999: 480). To have such an impact on existing realities, and to change collective patterns, “it is critical to change the way people think about who they are and, therefore, what is possible for them” (Fiol & O’Connor, 2002: 539). All of this occurs through communication, as language and practice form, in Bruner’s (1990: 19) words, “an inseparable unit”. Thus storytelling is not only part of making sense of organizational changes, but also shapes change, as “change comes from group storytelling conversations as precedent stories are told and revised to make sense of, and even decide, unfolding changes” (Boje, 1991b: 9).

Storytelling should, therefore, be of interest to practitioners of organizational change, and there is a significant body of practitioner literature. One concern expressed is that: “storytelling practice seems to be going forward without meaningful contact with academic work on storytelling” (Boje, 2006: 218). Boje (2006: 219) identifies six categories of practitioner storytelling books<sup>12</sup> and identifies a number of pitfalls with the advice they provide. He is concerned that generally stories are “viewed as easily changeable by simple recipes” (Boje, 2006: 222), without the consideration of the broader storytelling system (Boje, 2006: 222). As a consequence he argues that: “it is counterproductive to just rip a story out of one systemic context, tidy it up, and put it into some unsuspecting organization with its own complex

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<sup>12</sup> The six categories identified by Boje (2006: 219-220) were books:

1. written by CEOs turned story writers;
2. written by consultants with advice for CEOs to help them bring about successful change;
3. which coach CEOs (and HR specialists) on how to tell a better story;
4. for the executive too busy to collect stories;
5. which focus more on the performance of the story;
6. that look more at the total organizational system of storytelling.



systematicity” (Boje, 2006: 222), the prescription offered by many of the practitioner texts, in Boje’s view. As an alternative, Boje (2006: 223) suggests that stories from other organizations can be used to help organization members to reflect on their own story practices.

Some writers have risen to Boje’s challenge to provide more than simple recipes, and to encourage practitioners towards: “a way of thinking that invites us to stay in the movement of communicating, learning and organizing, to think from within our living participation in the evolution of forms of identity” (Shaw, 2002: 20). Denning (2005: 280) concedes that the effective use of narrative requires a different idea of what it means to be a leader; an approach to leadership that “swims in the richness and complexity of living and thrives on the connections between things.” He describes the importance of conversation in leading change (Denning, 2005:287), a theme developed by Shaw (2002). She considers change as ensemble improvisation to bring “attention to the place of spontaneity in the emergent processes of communicative action” (Shaw, 2002: 116), and takes on the challenge of describing the process of conversational change, without resorting to simple recipes. Her suggestion for practitioners involves a shift in the fundamental question being addressed to: “‘How do we participate in the way things change over time?’ meaning ‘How at the very moment of our joint sense-making experience, are we changing ourselves and our situation?’” (Shaw, 2002: 171). Contained in this shift of focus is a move towards the social constructed, interpretive perspective underlying a narrative approach to change, and has the potential to be the start of a different dialogue with practitioners.

## **2.8 CONCLUSIONS**

This review has examined the appropriateness of a narrative approach for studying the complexities of organizational change. It has considered the role of narrative in sensemaking, the exertion of organizational power and formation of individual and collective identities – all of which come to the fore

at times of radical organizational change. A narrative approach appears highly suited to study change, as it maintains the intricacies of particular organizational contexts, allows the many voices to be heard, and is an important medium through which meaning is created. This is reflected, not only of the linguistic turn in social science in general, but in the growing popularity of discursive – including narrative – approaches to change. These recent developments seek to address short comings of existing approaches to change, criticised by some as either too ‘micro’ or too ‘macro’.

There remain, however, some significant questions or ‘grey areas’ in the discussions of both narrative and change, both as separate subjects and in combination. Significant researchers in the field of narrative (e.g. Boje, Brown, Czarniawska, Gabriel and Humphreys) operate with distinct differences in their conception of what constitutes a story. Gabriel (2004, 63), for instance, argues that:

“viewing every type of text as a story obliterates those qualities that make stories vivid and powerful but also fragile sensemaking devices, obscures the skill and inventiveness entailed by storytelling and reduces the usefulness of studying stories in organizations”.

In contrast, Boje (2001: 1) introduces the concept of ‘antenarrative’, in order to focus on “the analysis of stories that are too unconstructed and fragmented to be analysed in traditional methods”. While some researchers recount their own work as stories – Czarniawska (1999) for whole industries, Rhodes (2001) and Brown (1998) for individual organizations, Gabriel (2004: 75) again counsels: “such stories, like other stories, are based on interpretations of narrative material, but the researcher’s interpretations are of a different order”.

As well as highlighting the different stances of leading academics, this interpretive difference raises the important question, for making sense of organizational change, of ‘who’ does the sensemaking. Narrative approaches have the potential to bring insight for employees, managers and researchers,

though each through a different lens. While the interpretive stance of the linguistic turn is less concerned with the precision of definitions (Gabriel, 2004: 63), the diversity of basic premises provides an unstable foundation for subsequent comparison of research. Similarly “our understanding of common change terms including ‘power’, ‘stability’, ‘turbulence’, ‘unfreeze’, ‘refreeze’, and even ‘change’ itself are by no means universally shared” (Grant et al, 2005: 12).

As this review has summarised, the conception of organization as a ‘discursive space’, where “what we experience as organization is the outcome of an interactive sensemaking process” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 968), challenges the very idea of organization change, particularly in its ‘traditional’ episodic structure (Weick & Quinn, 1999). As Ford and Ford (1994: 765) argue:

“there are no things in the world other than change, movement or process. Things such as people, organizations and ideas are all names given to abstractions of what are identifiable and relatively constant patterns of movement extending over the whole universe”.

There is a significant opportunity to continue the investigation of both narrative and change, in the space where they intersect, with the aim of adding clarity by example to both. As Boje (2006: 224) contests: “it is possible to begin the scholarly work of looking at the dynamics of the storytelling organization from a complex systems standpoint, one that is sensitive to the dialogic forces of both managerialism and resistance.” This study seeks to investigate this space in the context of organizational change in a large private sector organization. The next chapter on methodology examines how this was accomplished.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter details the approach used to undertake my investigation of organizational change in a large private sector organization, and the underlying assumptions that have informed my chosen methodology. Burrell and Morgan (1979: 2) contend: “different ontologies, epistemologies and models of human nature are likely to incline social scientists towards different methodologies”. This chapter clarifies my ontological and epistemological commitments, and the choices of methodology that follow. My overall aim has been to understand organizational change through the examination of the meanings attributed by participants to that change (Geertz, 1973). The use of qualitative methods, which allow for ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) to be developed without the imposition of a pre-determined frame of reference, provides an approach consistent with this purpose. Section 3.2 explores the theoretical debates behind this choice, and the steps I took in the development of my research are recounted in section 3.3. My rationale for using a single in-depth case study (3.4) and semi-structured interviews (3.5) to ‘collect data’ are then explained. Section 3.6 details the importance of a reflexive approach, and the implications of this for my roles as researcher and consultant. My approach to analysing the data collected is laid out in section 3.7, before my choice of representational strategies is described (3.8) and methodological conclusions drawn in the final section (3.9).

#### **3.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

As Burrell and Morgan (1979: 1) summarise: “all social scientists approach their subject via explicit or implicit assumptions about the nature of the social world and the way in which it may be investigated.” In this first section, I have made explicit my theoretical perspectives, and positioned these points of view within broader scholarly debates. In specifying the paradigm (Kuhn, 1970) within which I have been operating, I have accepted the set of often 'taken for granted' assumptions that give an underlying unity to that worldview (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 23). This has meant clarifying the ontology of the

phenomenon I was investigating - whether the 'reality' being studied is external to the individual or a product of individual consciousness – and my epistemological assumptions “about how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this knowledge to fellow human beings” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 1). The methodology chosen for a research project is the outcome of “a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology)” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 18). Therefore, my methodological choices are consistent with my adopted paradigm and its implicit assumptions.

In selecting an approach to my research, I had to choose between the “two fundamentally different and competing paradigms” (Patton, 1990: 37) that have characterised the history of social science (Hughes, 1990: 148), each following from an opposing intellectual tradition. The first, 'sociological positivism', reflects the attempt to apply models and methods derived from the natural sciences to the study of human affairs. The second tradition, that of 'German idealism', is “based on the premise that the ultimate reality of the universe lies in 'spirit' or 'idea' rather than in the data of sense perception” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 7). In spite of moves to broaden the debate (Martin, 1990a: 32), and warnings of adopting “false polarities” (Silverman, 1993: vii), methodologies still follow from these traditions, and typically polarize into quantitative, positivist or qualitative, phenomenological approaches (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991: 22). Burrell and Morgan (1979) provided a framework within which emerging, intermediate perspectives, each with its own particular configuration of assumptions, have been organised. Combining the subjective-objective dimension that characterises the approaches to social science, with two ways of considering the nature of society<sup>13</sup>, they described four distinct sociological paradigms - 'radical humanist', 'radical structuralist',

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<sup>13</sup> “We introduce the term 'sociology of regulation' to refer to the writings of theorists who are primarily concerned to provide explanations of society in terms which emphasise its underlying unity and cohesiveness. ... The 'sociology of radical change' stands in stark contrast to the society of regulation, in that its basic concern is to find explanations for the radical change, deep-seated structural conflict, modes of domination and structural contradiction which its theorists see as characterising modern society” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 17).

'interpretive' and 'functionalist', (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 23). I have approached this study from within the interpretive paradigm, which:

“is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action”. (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 28).

The traditional deductive methodologies associated with quantitative research have been accused of failing to deal with the increasing diversification contexts and perspectives, so that “research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies” (Flick, 1998: 2). An inductive approach was consistent with the primary aim of my exploring the complexities of organizational change and how sense is made, as “qualitative researchers are interested not in prediction and control but in understanding” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007: 4). This has led me to a focus in my qualitative inquiry on *what* and *how* questions, rather than the *why* questions that have been the hallmark of quantitative sociology (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000: 502). The concern in quantitative research to collect numbers in standardised ways has limited ability “to reveal deep understandings about human interaction” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007: 16). More fundamentally, the implicit assumption of the realist perspective that such objects of study as human relationships, interactions, dispositions, and culture can be treated as if they were physical things (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007: 9) is incompatible with a narrative approach, where 'the story' is one, if not the, primary unit that accounts for human experience. As Czarniawska (2001: 254) contends: “worlds are not given, they are constantly made and remade. This also means that meaning and knowledge are constructed, and not ‘found’ in things and events.”

Adopting an interpretive approach, where “rather than being a mirror of reality, theorising is seen as a process through which meaning is made” (Hatch, 1996), brings its own complexities. Taking a realist stance and believing in things and causes 'out there' can provide a practical approach, and as

Czarniawska (1999: 10) pragmatically states “it works most of the time”. Control, prediction, objectivity, and generalisability, the “glittering stars” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007: 15) of the positivist ‘dream’, are difficult even for qualitative researchers to relinquish. There were methodological consequences of adopting an interpretive approach and, therefore, studying “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 3). The focus on ‘thick description’ is in contrast to quantitative researchers who “are deliberately unconcerned with rich descriptions because such detail interrupts the process of developing generalisations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 10).

I had further decisions to take in designing my approach as “qualitative research, as a set of practices, embraces within its own multiple disciplinary histories constant tensions and contradictions” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 7). As Van Maanen (1979: 520) contends, the phrase ‘qualitative methods’ is “an umbrella term” under which a wide range of approaches reside. The next section describes the specific methodological choices I have taken, detailing the journey through the “complex maze where we are repeatedly faced with decisions and where paths wind back on one another” (Hammersley, 1992: 172), as my research approach was developed.

### **3.3 DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH**

The experience of designing and developing my research has resonance with the dance metaphor used by Janesick (2000: 383), who identifies “three stages of design – 1) warm up and preparation: design decisions at the beginning of the study 2) exploration and exercises: design decisions throughout the course of the study 3) cooling down: illumination and formulation - design decisions at the end of the study”. In other words, design decisions were being constantly taken through-out the life of the project. These began at the outset of my journey in January 2005, when I decided to seek a PhD supervisor

interested in an approach to organizational change, which allowed for the complexity to be 'left in' and not generalised away.

My initial direction was heavily influenced by my positivist educational background as an aeronautical engineer, as I looked for ways to mathematically model complexity (e.g. Boisot & Child, 1999; Levinthal & Warglien, 1999). In February 2005, Professor Andrew Brown at the University of Bath introduced me to an interpretive and, specifically, a narrative approach; prefacing our conversation with the assertion: "I don't do numbers". Plotlines, character, setting, and action (Bal, 1997) as Pinnegar and Daynes (2007: 20) contend: "provide ways of holding meaning together in more complex, relational, and therefore more nuanced ways than flowcharts or number tables". Further support for narrative as an approach to complexity can be found from Tsoukas and Hatch (2001: 981) for whom: "the developing logic of complexity theory itself is entirely compatible with an interpretive and ... a narrative, approach".

I began my 'warm up and preparation' during the summer of 2005 as I started my literature review, and quickly came to wrestle with what precisely constituted organizational change. What was the very thing that I want to examine? As Grant et al (2005: 12) contend: "our understanding of common change terms including 'power', 'stability', 'turbulence', 'unfreeze', 'refreeze', and even 'change' itself are by no means universally shared". However, if I considered, along with Czarniwska (1997: 41), that organization: "is an activity and not the resulting object", then the medium through which organization takes place is discourse, conversations between members of the organization and with other interested parties. This point of view is supported by Law (1994a) and Rhodes (2001: 33) who argue: "organization is not a noun but a verb which performs itself through the stories told about it". With no dialogue, there would be no organization. Conversations and exchanges may appear to produce artifacts, such as charts, job titles and roles, yet these reifications remain held in place by continued discourse.



I came to see that the way in which the pattern, focus and nature of this discourse alters over time is what constitutes organizational change. This changing discourse includes alterations in members understanding of other members (of their characters), as well as alterations in the sense made of the sequencing of activities and their 'causal' linkage (the plot), as organizational members seek to overcome their next collective predicament. In short, I decided to view organizational change as alteration in the shared stories told by members. This change can be accessed through capturing these stories and studying how they alter over time. Narrative has thus become both the method and the subject of this research (Brown & Humphreys, 2003: 139; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007: 5).

As Boje (2001: 9) asserts: "in narrative analysis we need to do more than treat stories as 'in-place metering' devices to measure more important constructs like culture, tacit knowledge or knowledge work". In arguing that organization is a product of narrative dialogue, I am accepting the existence of multiple realities, and organization as a process of negotiation between competing realities held by individual members. This perspective is consistent with relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 21), and fits with my theoretical stance described in the previous section. Multiple 'realities' are created in the interaction, or negotiation, between members and, furthermore, between researcher and 'subject', as the act of conducting research creates its own 'reality'.

In summary, I have taken an approach based on establishing meaning, which "is negotiated mutually in the act of interpretation; it is not simply discovered" (Schwandt, 2000: 195). This joint interpretation underlines the importance of my role as a researcher and what I bring to the interpretation; reflexivity is a critical component in interpretive research. The research report itself reflects the quality of the interaction and relationship between researcher and researched (Kirk & Miller, 1985), with the words of the participants supporting

the authenticity, resonance or trustworthiness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of the findings. At the end of my 'warm up and preparation', I decided to follow a case study approach to explore the multiple 'realities' of organizational members in their 'natural' setting. The case study approach taken is discussed further in the next section and, for now, I return to my own unfolding story.

With my formal MPhil/PhD registration secured in July 2005, I was beginning my literature review at the same time as working with the organization that was to become the focus of my study. In June 2005, I had begun working as a consultant with De Vere Group Plc, a UK based hotel and health club group, on a project to align employee behaviour with a newly defined customer branding and a set of corporate values. A short description of De Vere Group Plc is provided in Appendix 3 and is elaborated further in Chapter 4. During September and October 2005, I was involved in the delivery of five 2½ day launch events to hotel General Managers and their teams. At each event there were six or seven General Managers, accompanied by their leadership teams, typically comprising an Operations Manager, Revenue Manager, Finance Manager, Human Resources Manager, Leisure Manager and Sales Manager. These kick-off sessions were followed by five further two-day 'skills building' training sessions, with groups of the General Managers and their Human Resources or Operations Managers, equipping each of them to lead a four hour 'cascade' workshop with all their hotel staff.

In January 2006, I ran additional launch and skills building events for 6 hotels, which had been held back from the original programme. Each of these hotels – all part of the luxury De Vere brand – had a General Manager who had been appointed within the previous three months. With my literature review near completion, my research focus had turned at this time to methodology and, with it, early consideration of an organization with which to work. I had the idea of using De Vere Group as a case study, while talking to the Human Resources Director about evaluating the impact of her change programme. I met with the Human Resources Director and Organization Development

Manager in February 2006, to discuss the possibility of collaborating on a research project. This was followed up with a written proposal, which was used over the following weeks to gain the support of the Operations Director and Chief Executive. This proposal suggested the development of three 'mini-cases' - two hotels that were 'recipients' of the change programme (branded *Shine*) and the Head Office team responsible for its inception and delivery. The reasons for selecting a case approach, along with the use of semi-structured interviews, are discussed later. The use of interviews was in part a pragmatic choice allowing acceptable access, as it was an activity 'understood' by the stakeholders in the research organization. It was also a method in keeping with my interpretive and narrative approach.

By early April 2006, I had agreed with the Operations Director the two hotels for my mini-cases. Further information on the Grand Harbour and the Royal Bath, both located on the South Coast, is provided in Appendix 3. I had a preparatory meeting with the two hotel General Managers, together, in Bournemouth on 24 April 2006. After discussing my aims and specific requirements, and allowing the General Managers to raise any initial concerns, we agreed the first data collection interviews for 22 and 23 May at the Grand Harbour, and 8 and 9 June at the Royal Bath. Subsequently, the Head Office team interviews were set for the 31 May and 1 June.

The hotel interviews were completed as planned, with eleven interviews conducted at Grand Harbour (shortest 23 minutes, longest 56 minutes and average length 45 minutes), and ten at Royal Bath (shortest 34 minutes, longest 66 minutes and average length 52 minutes). Two of the Head Office staff rescheduled their interviews and were completed on 26 and 27 July 2006 – the latter with the Chief Executive. A total of nine Head Office interviews were completed (shortest 31 minutes, longest 80 minutes and average length 55 minutes), giving an initial group of thirty interviews. Each interview was digitally recorded – all successfully, with one exception where about one minute of data was lost due to batteries requiring replacement - and then

professionally transcribed. After transcription the shortest interview was 4,076 words, the longest 13,797 words, with an average of 8,046 words.

During this first phase of interviewing, I started another consulting assignment with the company, constructing a model of the behaviours required for high performance as a hotel General Manager, and as a hotel Operations Manager. This enabled further informal conversations, both with Head Office staff and hotel staff, bringing background to the ongoing change in the business. It also raised my awareness of the differences, and similarities, between my role as a consultant and that of researcher, a subject that I return to in section 3.6 on reflexivity.

When I conducted my interview on 27 July 2006 with the Chief Executive of De Vere Group Plc, he had already agreed a takeover by the Alternative Hotel Group (AHG), a business controlled by a property entrepreneur. AHG had been set up by the directors of two boutique hotel chains, which had recently acquired a chain of conference centres. An initial offer of 825p per share had been improved to 850p at the end of June, with competing interest from a private equity group, and a final agreement of 875p was reached - valuing the business at £767.4m. Shareholders approved the deal on 18 August, which completed on 5 September 2006.

By the end of 2006, all but one of my Head Office interviewees had left the business, as AHG restructured its operations. Concerns for my on going research project heightened in early 2007, when the General Manager of the Royal Bath also left De Vere. Without access to the new Head Office of AHG, the second round of interviews focused on the two hotels, one of which with a new General Manager. My interviews at the Grand Harbour were completed on the 16 and 23 March 2007 when thirteen interviews were completed (shortest 14 minutes, longest 71 minutes and average length 46 minutes). At the Royal Bath eleven interviews were completed on the 13 and 20 April 2007 (shortest 26 minutes, longest 76 minutes and average length 52 minutes). A

single Head office interview was completed, while at the Royal Bath on 13 April 2007 of 68 minutes duration. Again each interview was digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. After transcription the shortest interview was 3,300 words, the longest 14,120 words, with an average of 8,123 words.

A third and final set of interviews were conducted on 22 November 2007 at the Grand Harbour and at the Royal Bath on 30 November 2007. Seven interviews were completed at the Grand Harbour (shortest 19 minutes, longest 79 minutes and average length 46 minutes), while four were completed at Royal Bath (shortest 40 minutes, longest 66 minutes and average length 55 minutes). Therefore, over a period of 18 months I completed 66 interviews (shortest 14 minutes, longest 80 minutes and average length 50 minutes), with a total duration of 54 hours. The interviewees are listed in Appendix 2. There were two transcripts for the interview with the De Vere Group Human Resources Director, so the the 66 interviews produced 67 transcripts.

### **Vignette 3.1 – Memorable Moments**

What stands out as memorable thinking back over 66 interviews?

I remember the only time the technology let me down, when the batteries on my voice recorder ran out in the middle of my interview with the Group Human Resources Director. Fortunately, I was prepared with a spare set of batteries and only a few minutes of discussion were lost before I noticed and recovered the situation. However, this served to dent my early confidence, and made me very careful in using the technology.

I remember the shortest interview, less than 15 minutes. I managed to cover the entire range of questions, plus many supplementary ones, but was unable to elicit anything, but short answers to even the most open of questions. It was a timely reminder that even though I had become comfortable with the interview process, the same was not necessarily true for everyone else. Then again, maybe she was just a woman of few words.

I remember the longest interview, with the Group Marketing Director. He was enthusiastic and articulate and a great storyteller. We also had worked together on *Shine* so we already had an easy rapport. I can remember the satisfaction of a collecting well articulated stories, and this interview was an early encouragement of the approach I had chosen.

I remember the person who seemed to get most from our meetings. I interviewed the Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor on all three visits and she seemed to relish the opportunity to reflect and talk about her experiences. *Shine* had been an important event for her personally, encouraging her to take control of her own development, so she had enrolled on an evening course to become computer literate. Each subsequent interview felt as if she was taking stock of her own progress, as well as describing changes at the hotel: a reflexive housekeeper. It was deeply satisfying to have been a part of her learning, and showed just how much a research interview can influence an interviewee in unintended ways.

And finally, I remember all the locations where I interviews took place: a noisy London coffee lounge with the Chief Executive; quiet corners of hotel restaurants; corporate offices; makeshift spaces in the 'behind the scenes' offices at the hotels; newly refurbished meeting room suites and, of course, the 'Captain's Cabin' looking out over the sun bleached beaches of Bournemouth.

Returning to Janesick's dance metaphor, I had completed the 'exploration and exercises' and made many more detailed design decisions, as I responded to the challenges of the research environment. The next three sections look at the critical choices made to conduct a single in-depth case study, and to collect research data primarily through semi-structured interviews, before discussing reflexivity.

### **3.4 USING A SINGLE IN-DEPTH CASE STUDY**

I have chosen to use a 'single' in-depth case study as the core of my research. The use of case studies has a long tradition and fits well with the interpretive

paradigm adopted here. They allow details of the setting of the research to be retold, providing a backdrop against which individual stories can be presented and interpreted. As Dyer and Wilkins (1999: 615) assert, the ultimate goals of a case study “are generally to provide a rich description of the social scene, to describe the context in which events occur”, with the aim of revealing the deep structure of social behaviour (Light, 1979)<sup>14</sup>. Yin (1981: 59) distinguishes the case approach as one most suitable when “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. However, given that “the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are always blurred” (Czarniawska, 1997: 64) this definition still covers a wide range of situations. Schwandt (2000: 193) argues:

“in order to understand the part (the specific sentence, utterance or act), the inquirer must grasp the whole (the complex of intentions, beliefs, and desires or the text, institutional context, practice, form of life, language game and so on), and vice versa”.

This 'hermeneutic circle' lies at the heart of importance of context, and the efficacy of the case method. Dyer and Wilkins (1999: 616) link the purpose of understanding context to the generation of theory, asserting:

“the central issue is whether the researcher is able to understand and describe the context of the social dynamics of the scene in question to such a degree as to make the context intelligible to the reader and to generate theory in relationship to that context”.

Stake (2000: 441) highlights a different emphasis for case studies, in refining theory “and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping establish the limits of generalisability”. This relationship, between the case study and theory generation, has been taken up by Eisenhardt (e.g. Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) who argues for the use of multiple cases:

“between 4 and 10 cases usually works well. With fewer than 4 cases, it is often difficult to generate theory with much complexity, and its empirical grounding is likely to be unconvincing, unless the case has several mini-cases within it” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 545).

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<sup>14</sup> Yin (1981: 59) also highlights the importance of context by stating that a defining feature of the case study is that it examines “a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context”.

Dyer and Wilkins (1999: 614) counter this arguing “the more contexts a researcher investigates, the less contextual insight he or she can communicate”<sup>15</sup>.

I consider my approach to have been a single case study, but one that contains a number of mini-cases, with each setting being revisited at different points in time. Each mini-case, and each moment in time, is arguably a case in its own right and, as Yin (1994) asserts, the rich, empirical descriptions of case studies are typically based on a variety of data sources. With each individual representing his or her own 'reality', every conversation will be set in its own particular context. After all, from an interpretive perspective: “social reality, insofar as it is recognised to have any existence outside the consciousness of any single individual, is regarded as being little more than a network of assumptions and intersubjectively shared meanings” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 28-31). The distinctions, therefore, between single and multiple case studies are not straightforward.

Another way of considering the appropriate use of a case study is to examine how the case study promotes further understanding and learning. Geertz (1983) argues for the importance of local knowledge in understanding human culture and personal interaction; while Schütz (1973) postulates that human conduct is impossible to understand by ignoring its intentions, and human intentions are impossible to understand by ignoring the settings in which they make sense. Sarbin (1986a: 10) laments: “the commitment of discovering context-free forces as the source of conduct has served to separate psychological theorists from common sense wisdom”. For all these scholars the ‘deep’ exposition of immediate context is critical to take learning from a

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<sup>15</sup> Siggelkow (2007: 20) graphically illustrates the power of the single case with this adaption from Ramachandran (1998): “You cart a pig into my living room and tell me that it can talk. I say, “Oh really? Show me.” You snap with your fingers and the pig starts talking. I say, “Wow, you should write a paper about this.” You write up your case report and send it to a journal. what will the reviewers say? Will the reviewers respond with “Interesting, but that's just one pig. Show me a few more and then I might believe you?” I think we would agree that would be a silly response. A single case can be a very powerful example.”



situation, as “authors have described general phenomena so well that others have little difficulty seeing the same phenomena in their own experience and research” (Dyer & Wilkins, 1999: 617). For Stake (2000: 443) the transfer of learning remains difficult to understand, and “even less understood is how a small aspect of the case may be found by many readers to modify existing understanding about cases in general, even when the case is not typical”.

There is an uneasy relationship between existing knowledge, or other cases, and the example of a single case. While “illustration as to how a phenomenon occurs in the circumstances of several exemplars can provide valuable and trustworthy knowledge” (Stake, 2000: 444), direct comparison between cases risks destroying the ‘thick description’ at the heart of the approach<sup>16</sup>, as “damage occurs when the commitment to generalise or to theorise runs so strong that the researcher’s attention is drawn away from features important for understanding the case itself” (Stake, 2000: 439). Siggelkow (2007: 21) hints at the adoption of more quantitative methods, as researchers use multiple cases to “try to claim that they have a ‘representative sample’” an approach he sees as a “mismatch of method and goals”. Ultimately any researcher’s case study is a story of stories, and is a construction of the researcher’s “even when empathic and respectful of each person’s reality” (Stake, 2000: 441). The successful combination of contexts, or comparison of individual stories or even mini-cases, relies on effective storytelling by the researcher.

Unsurprisingly, qualitative researchers have sought different criteria for judging ‘good texts’, other than the positivist criteria of validity and reliability. Examples have included: Guba’s (1981) ‘trustworthiness’ – composed of truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality; Fisher’s (1987) ‘narrative

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<sup>16</sup> This dilemma is captured by Stake (2000, 444), “I see comparison as actually competing with learning about and from the particular case. Comparison is a grand epistemological strategy, a powerful conceptual mechanism, fixing attention on one or two attributes. And it obscures case knowledge that obscures case knowledge that fails to facilitate comparison. Comparison description is the opposite of what Clifford Geertz (1973) calls ‘thick description’”.

probability' (coherence) and 'narrative fidelity' (truth value), constituting 'narrative rationality'; Van Maanen's (1988) orientation, strength, richness and depth; and Golden-Biddle and Locke's (1993) authenticity, plausibility and criticality. This raises the question of how I will know when my specific social inquiries meet these criteria, or are faithful enough to some human construction that it is safe to act on them (Lincoln & Guba, 2000: 180). With a methodology that is grounded in a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, it is equally important *who* decides research is valid, as the criteria for judging either 'reality', or some form of validity are not absolute (Bradley & Schaefer, 1998). The judgement as to what is 'real', what is useful, and what has meaning, has to be derived from community consensus (Lincoln & Guba, 2000: 167), which involves a process of negotiation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000: 177). In the case of this thesis, the community concerned is that of academia, who need to be satisfied with my approach, which means meeting the conventions established that determine 'good' academic research.

In adopted an interpretive approach, I have accepted there is no 'external' reality against which to measure or compare my work, outside of the general conventions of good academic practice. I can ensure, however, an 'internal consistency' within the representation of my results – the story I tell of the stories I have heard. This challenge of representation is discussed in section 3.9.

### **3.5 APPROACHING DATA COLLECTION**

The main 'data collection' method used was the semi-structured interview. The interview has become an accepted activity in organizational life, often forming part of my work as a consultant, for instance, and was readily seen as a legitimate approach by my sponsors. It also involved minimum disruption to hotel operations, unlike a potentially more intrusive approach, such as direct observation. There is also a connection between the interview methodology and a narrative approach, as Gubrium and Holstein (1998) contend the interview has "become a means of contemporary storytelling", and can be

considered in its own right as “an interpersonal drama with a developing plot” (Pool, 1957: 193). As Charmaz (2000: 514) argues: “qualitative researchers should gather extensive amounts of rich data with thick description”; as “thick description makes thick interpretation possible” (Janesick, 2000: 391; Denzin, 1989). The term 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) is essential to the appreciation of context, as described in the previous section, and a critical outcome of data collection.

Semi-structured formal interviews have been described as “situated narratives” (Silverman, 1993: 108) or “conversations with a purpose” (Burgess, 1984: 102), which aim at, what Mason (2002: 63) refers to as, the “construction or reconstruction of knowledge rather than the excavation of it”<sup>17</sup>. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007: 7) believe that researchers can only embrace a narrative approach when they “recognise and embrace the interactive quality of the researcher-researched relationship”, which, for Lincoln and Guba (2000: 175), extends to participants taking an “active role in nominating questions of interest for any inquiry”. Eliciting stories from interviews can be a natural process as, according to Mishler (1986: 69): “telling stories is far from unusual in everyday conversation and it is apparently no more unusual for interviewees to respond to questions with narratives if they are given some room to speak”.

Conducting interviews allowed me to probe for stories told in the field and, at the same time, to jointly construct a ‘story of stories’ with the managers and employees of De Vere. The interviews were augmented with broader organizational data, through informal conversations with insiders and my work in the organization as a management consultant, as well as other forms of story from websites, and other relevant data, including customer and employee surveys. Fontana and Frey (2000: 645) argue: “asking questions and

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<sup>17</sup> These multiple levels of data construction have been referred to by: Geertz (1973: 9) as “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to”; by Giddens (1993) as a 'double hermeneutic'; and by Van Maanen (1979) as 'first and second-order concepts’.

getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first". They elaborate by describing interviews as active interactions, rather than neutral tools, which lead to "negotiated, contextually based results" (Fontana & Frey, 2000: 646). This element of co-creation of the interview content is consistent with the subjectivist epistemology of my approach. With the interviewer firmly part of the process of the creation of the interview data, "the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain" (Spradley, 1979) are critical to gain deeper insight into the world of the subject. Oakley (1981: 49) asserts there can be "no intimacy without reciprocity", so my responses to the interviewee's answers played an important part in creating the necessary 'intimacy'. The skill of the interviewer will influence the data 'collected', as by "establishing trust and rapport at the beginning of the study, the researcher is better able to capture the nuances and meanings of each participant's life from the participant's point of view" (Janesick, 2000: 384).

While building relationships, I was also attempting to suspend "all commitments to *a priori* or privileged versions of the social world, focusing instead on how members accomplish a sense of social order" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000: 490), adopting what Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) refer to as an attitude of 'ethnomethodological indifference'. While my intention was to be an organiser and participant in a dialogue (Bakhtin 1984), it is clear that:

"researchers supply meaning to what they hear and what they hear is guided by the interview participant's decisions about what they think the interviewer is interested in hearing" (Rhodes, 2001: 38).

Furthermore, during the interview, as Buttny (1993: 18) asserts, participants often use narratives to "re-present past events in such a way to defend their conduct", and the fear of an unwanted response from the interviewer can lead people during interview to change their narratives (Gergen, 2004: 276). All of which underlines the complexity of what is said or not said (Freeman, 2004: 76) by participants during interview.

The breadth of information elicited during the interview is improved by taking an unstructured approach (Fontana & Frey, 2000: 652), as the accounts of participants' experience are less constrained by the researcher's preconceptions, than more structured approaches (Alvesson, 1996). My planned 'standard' set of questions, see Appendix 1, only provided a point of departure for the interview. The complex relationship between interviewer, writer, respondent, and the interview all "intertwined in a deeply problematic way" (Fontana & Frey, 2000: 659), and thus required me to reflect throughout as to how the interviews were completed, and the data interpreted (Fontana & Frey, 2000: 666). In conclusion, the products of interviews cannot be considered in isolation of the manner in which they were produced (Hester & Francis 1994), and may be best considered compelling narratives (Silverman 1993), rather than potentially accurate or distorted reports of reality. For Pinnegar and Daynes (2007: 29) the relationships built during interviews have a central role as: "what fundamentally distinguishes the narrative turn from 'scientific' objectivity is understanding that knowing other people and their interactions is always a relational process that ultimately involves caring for, curiosity, interest, passion, and change".

### **3.6 REFLEXIVITY**

Reflexivity, or seeking to explore ourselves as management researchers by engaging "with ourselves through thinking about our own thinking" (Johnson & Duberley, 2003: 1279), has come to the fore during the past 20 years (Weick, 1999). For some scholars, reflexivity "as a fundamental quality, underlies various attempts to understand and intervene in human relationships" (Holland, 1999: 463). Reflexivity has come into common use, taking its place in the dictionary, as Holland quotes from the Oxford English Dictionary:

Reflexivity - "Applied to that which turns back upon, or takes account of, itself or a person's self, especially methods that take into consideration the effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on the investigation" (Holland, 1999: 464).

This definition further highlights the critical reflection on the self by the researcher - the “human as instrument” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Reinharz (1997: 3) argues we not only “bring the self to the field ... [we also] create the self in the field”, suggesting that reflexivity runs deeper than simply explaining our influence on our interpretations, towards understanding our identity as researchers.

In recognition of the researchers' impact, there has been a call for “more personal disclosure of the authors' biases and involvement with a particular setting” (Dyer & Wilkins, 1999: 618), and the acceptance, by some (e.g. Riley 1991), of the creation of cultural and organizational fictions through the process of research. The pre-understandings, often unacknowledged, of researchers impact on how management research is undertaken, and on the results it produces, have been a focus for recent academic discussion (e.g. Chia, 1995; Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999; Palmer & Dunford, 1996; Watson, 1995). These pre-understandings or “subjective metatheoretical commitments” (Johnson & Duberley, 2003: 1280) cannot be removed from our thinking, but must, therefore, be inspected carefully through our capacity for reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990). Though as Johnson and Duberley (2003: 1281) point out we cannot detach ourselves from our metatheoretical commitments during this reflexive activity, as we will be using the very same perspectives to undertake the task. We cannot access all our biases, as Marcus (1994) argues, many attitudes on gender, race, class, cultural and other limitations remain unconscious to the researcher. These complications in no way diminish the importance of being reflexive, as “we can never improve our understanding unless we examine and reformulate our assumptions” (Douglas, 1987: 8)<sup>18</sup>, with the role of reflexive analysis to expose the underlying assumptions on which we as researchers build our arguments

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<sup>18</sup> Other researchers have made similar assertions, for example Holland (1999: 482) contends that “reflexive movement or realization depends on breaking out of an existential disciplinary, professional, paradigmatic, or speciality, 'thought style' (cosmology, basic assumption, mindset) which limits awareness and thereby movement”, while Schwandt (2000: 195) more succinctly argues “understanding requires the *engagement* of one’s biases”

and stances (Holland, 1999: 467). Tsoukas and Hatch (2001: 1001) illustrate the impact of these pre-understandings, or self-fulfilling prophecies (Landau, 1972), in complex systems, contending that taking a reflexive approach:

“should help complexity researchers to reflect critically on the features they attribute to systems (i.e. non-linear, scale dependant, recursive, sensitive to initial conditions and emergent) and expose the purposes and motivations that link them to the systems they seek to observe (e.g. the desire for predictability)”.

Janesick (2000: 384) summarises this neatly: “qualitative researchers have open minds, but not empty minds”.

One particular area for reflexive activity in my research is my dual role of consultant and researcher within the same organization. As identified by Barry (1997, 30) organizational change “is often enacted in distinctly utilitarian and modernist ways”, with an “‘authorial’ expertise rooted in the notion of an objective, independent reality”. This perspective matches my own experiences as a consultant. The expectation from clients is often that, as a consultant, you carry with you ready answers, transferable from other contexts, to universal problems of organization - a stark contrast from my interpretative stance as a researcher.

As Boje et al. (1994) assert the “consultant acts to establish new frame alignments”, where the way a problem is ‘framed’ will also fundamentally determines the appropriate approach to its solution (Schoen, 1983). In acting as a researcher I was not seeking to align the way in which organization members interpreted their situation, though in requiring them to reflect on their experiences, I will have caused them to examine, and potentially alter, their framing of their situation. In gaining access in January 2005, I committed to my research organization to provide a “*written report, separate from my PhD, ... focused on application of the lessons learnt across the De Vere Group*”. This reflected my expectation that, for the organization to extract value from my research, I would need to rewrite my findings into applications more

consistent with my stance as a consultant, not as a researcher.<sup>19</sup> My experience as a qualitative researcher has begun to influence my consulting practice, though I have yet to answer fully Czarniawska's (2001: 263) question: "is constructionist consulting possible and in what way can it be useful?" If it is possible, and Czarniawska appears unsure, reflexivity is at the heart of the constructionist consultant's role, through encouraging "further legitimisation of the reflection on practice" (Czarniawska, 2001: 264).

My role as a consultant brings other concerns to my research, especially my involvement with the change programme that forms a backdrop to this study. I have already described how interviewees may tell the stories they believe the researcher wants to hear (Rhodes, 2001: 38), and whether out of politeness, or concern regarding my association with senior management, this may have influenced my discussions. My own responses to comments perceived as critical to my consulting work, while somewhat subject to my conscious control, could have perpetuated these concerns. With this in mind, I found myself underplaying my involvement with *Shine*, during the introduction to later interviews. This could be considered an example of reflexivity leading to "simultaneous data collection and analysis, with each informing and focusing the other throughout the research process" (Charmaz, 2005: 508), an approach associated with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In considering reflexivity it is necessary to reference ontological and epistemological considerations, as they "constitute particular forms of reflexivity" (Johnson & Duberley, 2003: 1279). For instance, a positivist stance leads to a methodological reflexivity, which can be characterised as:

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<sup>19</sup> The proposal was described in more interpretive language, highlighting understanding as the principle outcome from an open-ended approach, as this extract from my written proposal illustrates: "The interviews conducted will be open-ended, looking to provide an opportunity for the participants to 'tell their story' with respect to *Shine!* and the broader aspects of their organizational life. Repeating the interviews, preferably with the same people, will provide insight into the change taking place and underlying factors influencing the process. The benefit to De Vere Group will be a deeper understanding of the interplay between Head office and hotels during a centrally initiated change and the way in which the initiative becomes part of everyday hotel practice - or not."



“a localised critique and evaluation of the 'technical' aspects of the particular methodology deployed, rather than the underlying metatheoretical assumptions that justify that methodology in the first place” (Johnson & Duberley, 2003: 1284)

Johnson and Duberley (2003: 1285) further argue from a positivist perspective: “the researcher's own involvement in the research process, beyond ostensibly technical methodological issues, [is] unproblematic”. In contrast, taking an interpretive approach reflexivity introduces another layer of context – that of the narrator (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 1001). As Gubrium and Holstein (2000: 491) argue, there is a strong relationship between context and reflexivity as “descriptions of a setting constitute that setting, while they are simultaneously being shaped by the contexts they constitute”. This postmodern approach to reflexivity leads to a deconstruction of management researchers’ representational practices (Johnson & Duberley, 2003: 1287).

In revealing a researcher's underlying assumptions though, it raises the problem of assessing which aspects of the researcher's character are most important in this deconstruction (Johnson & Duberley, 2003: 1295). For postmodernists, a text can never be settled or stable as it can always be reflexively questioned to reveal those meanings that have been suppressed (Linstead & Grafton-Small, 1992). There becomes an unending spiral of deconstructive unsettling, where there can be no 'fixed' truth or 'final' outcome (Linstead, 1993). The reflexive process aims at revealing the researcher's biases and deferred or marginalised meanings within any communication (Gergen, 1992), so that deconstruction must:

“resuscitate the subordinate terms, to elevate them, to amplify the silent voices in order to problematise the dominant understanding and, rather than create a new hierarchy, re-construct a duality of awareness within conventional consciousness” (Linstead, 1993: 69).

Chia (1995) relates this reflexive deconstruction to a positivist perspective, suggesting that it highlights the formative processes that have attributed a false concreteness to our objects of analysis. For Johnson and Duberley (2003: 1295) this postmodern approach: “has opened the door to the possibility of

polyphonous research texts where multiple voices can be heard”. For me, the impact of my own biases and interpretations, on the stories of change in De Vere, has been of frequent reflection throughout this thesis and is explored further during the autoethnographic reading in section 8.4 of my discussion chapter.

### **3.7 ANALYSING THE DATA**

Freeman (2004: 71) contends that: “social scientists, including psychologists interested in narrative, have been unduly restrictive in their conception of what constitutes legitimate data”. In analysing my data I have taken a broad definition of what constitutes a story, treating all the material created in the interviews as narrative. This contrasts with some writers for whom storytelling involves a “narrow sense of narratives with simple but resonant plots and characters, involving narrative skill, entailing risk and aiming to entertain, persuade and win over” (Gabriel, 2000: 22). The interview transcripts, and other information, was used to identify the retelling of ‘stories of change’, originally told in the course of daily work activities.

These 'stories of change' have been retold out of their 'original' context, and performed in the particular setting of the interview, an environment with its own accepted norms of behaviour. My analysis has focused mostly on the content of stories, rather than their performance, due to the complication of the interview setting. I recognise that: “stories are not just chronologies (a sequence of events), but situated, responsive performances” (Cunliffe et al, 2004: 273); and therefore: “meaning making is a negotiated, synchronic process because narrative performance and understanding are situated in many moments of time and context” (Cunliffe et al, 2004: 273). The interview focuses on a retrospective account of change, and the stories told by interviewees may be more considered, compared to a ‘live’ account in the workplace, where performance may be a more critical component. That is not to say that the retelling is an unemotional act as in recounting a story, interviewees: “can and often do ‘tell it their way’ embellishing it and enriching

it in unpredictable and idiosyncratic ways, suffusing the narrative with a personal and highly subjective symbolism” (Gabriel, 1995: 481).

The interview is much more than simply a retrospective account of what has happened, and the material created and recorded in the transcripts, contains a rich, complex narrative, not just examples of ‘in the field’ stories. My research report is a further story of these ‘stories of stories’, and one that cannot be considered as neutral. In constructing the report, I have selected the particular representations for my purposes, a choice which is also an act of repression of alternatives (Linstead, 1993). As Geertz (1995) asserts, representing others cannot easily be separated from manipulating them, even if this manipulation is not pre-meditated.

I have focused on the sense made by participants, at all hierarchical levels, of the changes taking place within their organization. In order to give these changes meaning, participants were encouraged to describe the impact of these changes on their working lives. In doing so, the aim was not to focus on personal change at the individual level, though there is the recognition that in a socially constructed world making a clean distinction between individual and organizational change is troublesome. The purpose of this study is to bring insight to how collective change is made sense of, and acted upon, by organizational members, recognising that each individual will provide their own interpretations, which will influence and be influenced by their own personal change.

Faced with a large quantity data, in the form of interview transcripts, I had many choices of approach, especially as “interpretation is an art; it is not formulaic or mechanical” (Denzin, 1998: 317). The approaches of the literary critics, (e.g. Bakhtin, Barthes, Booth, Campbell, and Frye) have historically provided tools for narrative analysis (Martin, 1986). Rhetorical analysis has only played a small part in management studies (e.g. Feldman & Sköldbberg, 2002), in spite of being one traditional way of analysing narrative

(Czarniawska, 2007: 392). Another approach to examining narrative is structural analysis (e.g. Soderberg, 2003). Similar to semiology and formalism (Propp, 1968; Barthes, 1977), it has most prevalent in management studies through the work of Greimas (e.g. Greimas, 1983; Greimas & Courtés, 1987), however: “almost before structuralism acquired legitimacy in the social sciences, it was swept away by post-structuralism” (Czarniawska (2007: 393). From an interpretive perspective, structures cannot be 'found' in texts, as they are created by the author and the reader.

In approaching my analysis I have drawn on a deconstructive perspective, which is an extension of post-structuralism (Czarniawska, 2007: 393) with a particular focus on power. To attempt to briefly define deconstruction misses the very point, as Derrida and Caputo (1997: 32) assert, “cracking nutshells is what deconstruction is. In a nutshell”. They describe deconstruction as “turned towards opening, exposure, expansion and complexification, to releasing unheard-of, undreamed-of possibilities” (Derrida & Caputo, 1997: 31), the very opposite of encapsulating anything in a ‘nutshell’. Derrida (1999: 65) contends that deconstruction is not a method or a philosophy, it is something that is continually happening, stories self-deconstruct with every telling.

In approaching the analysis of organizational change from within an interpretive paradigm, I am not looking for a reality outside the individual stories created during my interview. Even if such a ‘reality’ were to exist, I am unable to gain any form of privileged access to it. I am, however, able to interpret the individual stories of change I collect, looking for the different ways in which change in the organization has been viewed by those experiencing it. My aim, in analysing my interview transcripts, was to see multiple interpretations of reality, while seeking to avoid relying on “sequential, single voiced stories” (Boje, 2001: 9). Deconstruction, as an analytic strategy, exposes in a systematic way the multiple ways a text can be interpreted, revealing “ideological assumptions in a way that is particularly

sensitive to the suppressed interests of members of disempowered, marginalised groups” (Martin, 1990b: 340). Boje (2001: 19), while asserting: “deconstruction is a poststructuralist epistemology, not a formula-method with steps and procedures”, identifies eight specific ‘moves’ in applying a deconstructive approach<sup>20</sup>. In drawing on this approach, my aim is to inform or organise my ‘story of the stories’ of the research subjects, by deciding what to place in the foreground and what in the background, while “looking beneath the surface of the story” (Boje, 2001: 28).

In looking at multiple stories, I was not seeking to present one ‘grand narrative’ or “regime of truth” (Brown, 1991: 192-3) or “a meta-narrative that subjugates and marginalises other discourses” (Boje, 2001: 35). However, I do recognise that individual stories, or microstoria, sit within the context of ‘bigger’ or ‘broader’ narratives. I have sought to represent this Tamara-like (Boje, 1995) interweaving of stories, within my analysis and presentation. Common storylines representative of organizational groups were a focus in reconstructing ‘my version’ of the story, or in making my ‘eighth move’ where, the eighth move “is to resituate the dualities, voices and traces, and its hierarchy into a new rendering of a story” (Boje, 2001: 22). However, in my re-telling I accept that I was “never witness to or able to reassemble a ‘whole story’” (Boje, 2001: 65). In the reconstruction of an ‘overall story’, that is in writing this thesis, it was tempting to seek explanation for the causes of the plots and events described, however, in “the post-modern world of storytelling organizations linear causality is a convenient fiction” (Boje, 2001: 94).

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<sup>20</sup> The eight moves identified by Boje (2001) were:

1. Duality search
2. Reinterpret the hierarchy
3. Rebel voices
4. Other side of the story
5. Deny the plot
6. Find the exception
7. Trace what is between the lines
8. Resituate

During the analysis of my transcripts I used the NVivo, Version 7, software package to manipulate my data. I was concerned at the outset that the software would, both literally and metaphorically, place a strong frame around my analysis. However, its utility in extracting, coding and tracking elements of my text outweighed any fears I may have had. The initial phase of my analysis was to select a small number of transcripts that were in some way representative of the full data set, in order to generate the widest possible range of dualities, or codes, relating to organizational change. I selected ten transcripts from across hierarchical levels, locations and times, before working through each one looking to identify as many interpretations of the material, relevant to organizational change, as possible. I used NVivo to code the relevant selection of text, creating a collection of extracted stories under provisional titles. After these initial ten transcripts, the dozen most referenced codes were:

1. leadership
2. resistance
3. empowered
4. central office to hotels relationship
5. changing personnel
6. strategy or vision
7. values
8. measurement
9. language - integration of change
10. culture
11. triggers of change
12. pace

This level of detailed coding took four months of elapsed time and as the following file notes demonstrates was often frustrating and slow:

“Beginning to code a transcript that took two days to correct, I hope it is an anomaly! It was an articulate employee, so it had some good stuff in it ... a lot more codes about resistance” (File note: 30 October 2008).

At this stage, I examined the themes that were emerging, and started to organise the codes into a hierarchical structure, a process facilitated by NVivo. I used the extracted stories to begin to shape my own narrative, a very early

draft of my data presentation chapters, in order to understand the emerging stories in more detail and test the major categories I had identified. This approach verified my overall choice of structure, as one which would allow me to tell interesting story of organizational change, and illustrated the need for many more transcripts to be analysed before I could begin to organise my data beyond these broad categories.

I wanted to impose the minimum of structure to the transcripts to allow the themes to emerge from my interview data. I created four 'big buckets' into which I coded three quarters of my transcripts, a further forty transcripts, on top of the original ten. At the time, these categories were labelled case study, leadership, change and resistance. In addition to identifying short fragments, or terse stories, appropriate to each of these broad categories, I also identified longer extracts, in order to capture more of the context in which the story was told. My file note on completion of this stage of analysis, expressed my relief:

"I have done the 50 transcripts which make up the 75%. Hurrah! This includes 73 'whole stories' which I have now cut into the right sections. The final count of quantity of coding (before the whole stories) was: Case study – 167 references (from 38 sources), Change – 360 (42), Leadership – 349 (41), Resistance – 240 (40)" (File note: 16 March 2009).

I used this initial coding of my data to write draft data presentation chapters. For each chapter, I worked through the collected stories seeking patterns, connections and interesting arguments, in order to organise the data into chapters. This was an emergent and iterative process, with initial structures being refined or giving way to stronger emerging ideas. This process was also shaped by my literature review, as well as prompting additional reading, for example, on paradox and change. This process led to the organization of each chapter as contained in this thesis, and included the renaming of one of the chapters from 'stories on leadership' to 'stories on power, autonomy and control'.

Prior to completion of each chapter the remaining twenty five percent of my transcripts were used to provide further examples and illustration of particular points in each story. Further detail of the complexities and anxieties involved in this part of the creation of this thesis are reflected on in section 8.4, my autoethnographical reading.

### **3.8 REPRESENTATIONAL STRATEGY**

The choices regarding the presentation of my findings was another important area of decision making (Czarniawska, 2007: 398), given that the 'how' of writing unavoidable changes the 'what' of the research (Rhodes, 2001: 7). This was particularly evident when I was beginning to write my data presentation chapters, and reflects methodological design decisions in Janesick's third or 'cooling down' phase of the study (Janesick, 2000: 383). Rhodes sets these decisions against a backdrop of indifference, where:

“writers have conventionally ignored the way that they write in favour of concentrating on what it is that is (putatively) being written about to the extent that writing strategies are naively understood as conduits of pre-given and extra-textual meaning” (Rhodes, 2002: 6).

Reflexivity continued to play a central role as: “writing – of all the texts, notes, presentations, and possibilities – is also a process of discovery: discovery of the subject (and sometimes the problem itself) and discovery of the self” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000: 184). The involvement of the researcher in the research report has been highlighted in the report's comparison to a 'literary collage' (Czarniawska, 1999: 24), that is, a compilation of texts authored, not only by the researcher, but practitioners and theoreticians. This analogy fits the polyphonic nature of an interpretive approach and encourages the authorship of different pieces of the collage to be clearly attributed (Czarniawska, 1999: 24).

With 'truth' something constructed rather than discovered (Jacobson & Jacques, 1997), an interpretive research report can be considered as one truth story amongst many possible stories (Rhodes, 2001: 9). Within this frame of



reference the boundaries between fact and fiction become blurred as all writing creates, rather than discovers, rhetoric to make a point. That is, both 'fact' and 'fiction' seek to "model the world" (Phillips, 1995: 627). Furthermore, representational strategies draw on effective storytelling, and as Czarniawska (2007: 397) argues: "writing straightforward fiction is not ... seen as a legitimate social science endeavour: Writing like fiction might be another matter". In representing the stories of change told by the managers and employees of De Vere, I have sought to create an interesting narrative that brings insight to the experience of organizational change, which will inevitably contain a "blending of what is known about a situation (facts) with relevant conjectures (imagination)" (Sarbin, 1986b: xii).

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

In setting out to understand the meanings given to the experiences of change by the members of a single organization, my approach was clearly on the qualitative side of a divide in research approach (Smircich, 1983). My interest has not been a positivist one, that is to say, looking for causes, control, and ways to generalise or predict. I have adopted a stance where "truth, or reality, becomes a socio-linguistic artefact" (Johnson & Dubberley, 2003: 1286). I have chosen to explore this through semi-structured interviews, through one in-depth, multi-site case study. In following this interpretive perspective: "truth, whether in terms of rationally grounded consensus or of correspondence to an independent reality, is no longer considered to be a worthwhile goal" (Johnson & Duberley, 2003: 1286). Consequently, my objective was deeper understanding of the multiple worlds of organizational members and, reflexively, my own world. This approach "redefines the task of professional knowledge creators, instructing them to study and reveal the process of construction itself" (Czarniawska, 2001: 255) and sets out to help organization members on the assumption that if they "can better understand how they construct themselves and their organization, they will be better able to address their problems" (Barry, 1997: 31).

## 4. THE CASE STUDY

### 4.1 BACKGROUND

#### 4.1.1 De Vere Group Plc

In the spring of 2006 De Vere Group operated hotels, timeshare lodges and health and fitness clubs in the United Kingdom. De Vere was organized into four key divisions. The first was *De Vere Hotels*, an upmarket, chain of four and five-star hotels in city, coastal and rural locations. This comprised nineteen hotels with a total of 2,939 bedrooms, typically offering conference, events and leisure facilities (including 13 golf courses). The division also included *De Vere Resort Ownership*, which operated 155 five-star timeshare lodges alongside three De Vere hotels. The second hotel brand operated by De Vere Group was *Village Hotels & Leisure Clubs*. In contrast to the individual nature of each property in De Vere Hotels, the Village properties were a purpose built chain of mid-market hotels within easy reach of major towns and cities. Each Village has a hotel with around 100 bedrooms and a large health and leisure club – with an independent membership. In 2006 there were sixteen Village properties, with 1,767 bedrooms and 66,464 leisure members. As well as a more typical hotel restaurant, each property operated a ‘Village Pub’ providing a food and beverage offer similar to traditional public houses.

In addition, De Vere Group operated *Greens*, a chain of fifteen standalone health and fitness clubs, with 69,993 members and owned spirit manufacturer *G&J Greenall*, the maker of Bombay Sapphire Gin. This final division was a throwback to the history of De Vere Group, which also explains its head office location in Warrington, Cheshire. The story De Vere began with the formation of *Greenalls Brewery* in 1762, which moved from St Helens to Warrington in 1787. Brewing continued until 1991 and it was in early 1999 that Greenalls sold its 1,241-strong tenanted pub estate to Nomura for £370m and its Pubs and Restaurants to Scottish & Newcastle for £1.14b. The estate included 531 managed pubs, 234 pub restaurants and 61 Premier Lodge budget hotels. This time also marked the end of a diversification strategy, which saw the disposal in 1996 of nursing homes and six hotels in the USA. The focus on domestic

hotels and leisure clubs had begun in 1973, when Greenalls bought the golf-focused Belfry hotel in Warwickshire. Further properties were added in the late 1990s and it was in February 2000 that the group changed its name from Greenalls Group to De Vere Group. In February 2001 the group sold its Tavern drinks wholesaling business, to leave the business with the same divisional structure as at the beginning of my research. In March 2004 the major De Vere shareholder, GPG Holdings, launched a partial offer of £118m to buy 25% of the group's shares on top of the 10% it already owned, proposing a strategy for the group to sell off De Vere hotels for £550m. However, in June GPG's raised bid of £122m lapsed as few shareholders took up the offer. In February 2005 De Vere finalised a 'sale-and-manageback' of the De Vere Belfry to Irish insurance and leisure group Quinn for £186m, a near 50% premium on its book value. The comparative financial scale of each of the divisions at the time starting my research can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 4.1 - Operating Figures for the Half-year to March 2006**

<b>De Vere Hotels and Resorts</b>
Total turnover: £73.5m (2005: £83.6m)
Total operating profit: £9.1m (2005: £14m)
<b>Village Hotels and Leisure Clubs</b>
Turnover: £44.8m (2005:£40.3m)
Operating profit: £8.3m (2005: £8.1m)
<b>Greens</b>
Turnover: £16.3m (2005: £16.2m)
Operating profit: £1.3m (2005: £2m)
<b>G&amp;J Greenall</b>
Turnover: £12m (2005: £14.3m)
Operating profit: £829,000.8m (2005: £472,000)

Source: Interim Results 2006

During my research at De Vere Group, there were further major changes in corporate ownership. In June 2006, Verve Venues owner Alternative Hotel Group (AHG) agreed an 825p takeover offer with the De Vere board that valued De Vere at £723.5m. An informal approach from private equity group Permira (owner of the Travelodge budget chain) of 840p per share was rejected by the De Vere board. However, the Permira's offer prompted a revised bid from AHG of 850p per share, and in July 2006 AHG was forced into a third offer of 875p per share (valuing De Vere at £767.4m), before Permira withdrew.

Alternative Hotel Group AHG, a hospitality investment company, comprised a group of investors, led by a director at the Marylebone Warwick Balfour (MWB) Group and other MWB directors acting privately, and partnering with Bank of Scotland, which was a 50 per cent shareholder in AHG. AHG was formed to acquire Initial Style Conferences in December 2005, the UK-based business training and conference venue provider, from its parent company Rentokil for £325 million in cash. The portfolio of 29 properties was re-branded Verve Venues, carrying the strap line 'Beautiful Places - Inspiring Spaces'. MWB was formed in 1994, acquiring two hotel chains - Malmaison in November 2000 and Hotel du Vin in October 2004. While AHG and MWB were separate companies, there was cross-over between senior directors.

In early 2007, after the acquisition of De Vere Group, AHG began a brand and structural rationalisation. Verve, formerly Initial Style Conferences, was renamed De Vere Venues, ahead of an extensive refurbishment that concentrated on improving bedrooms and the food offer at the business. Several of the former De Vere Hotels properties were transferred into the conferencing business. The AHG Chief Executive said at the time "Now that we have acquired De Vere, we have decided to adopt the name that has so much recognition with both the general public and business users" (Caterer-on-line, 15 February 2007). The De Vere Hotels and Resorts business was divided into Heritage and Deluxe brands. De Vere Deluxe was the company's

top end hotel offer, with six properties, including the Royal Bath in Bournemouth. Its entry hotel brand was De Vere Heritage, which included seven properties initially including the Grand Harbour Hotel in Southampton. The Grand Harbour was subsequently reclassified a De Vere Deluxe property. This distinction was maintained through all my subsequent visits to the hotels, however in 2008 AHG returned to single brand of De Vere Hotels, dispensing with the Heritage and Deluxe distinction.

#### **4.1.2 Industry Analysis**

The United Kingdom hotel market is substantial, and during the period of my research was growing at an average rate of around 6.5% per annum (see Table 2). The UK domestic consumer represents the single largest share of the market (see Table 3) making the domestic leisure market an important segment for many De Vere Hotels properties, especially those in regional settings. AHG sold De Vere's only London hotel, the Cavendish for £100 million, simultaneously with its takeover in September 2006.

**Table 4.2 - United Kingdom Hotels Industry Value**

<b>Year</b>	<b>£ billion</b>	<b>% change, year-on-year</b>
2004	12.3	-
2005	13.2	7.6
2006	14.1	6.5
2007	15.1	6.9
2008	15.8	5.4

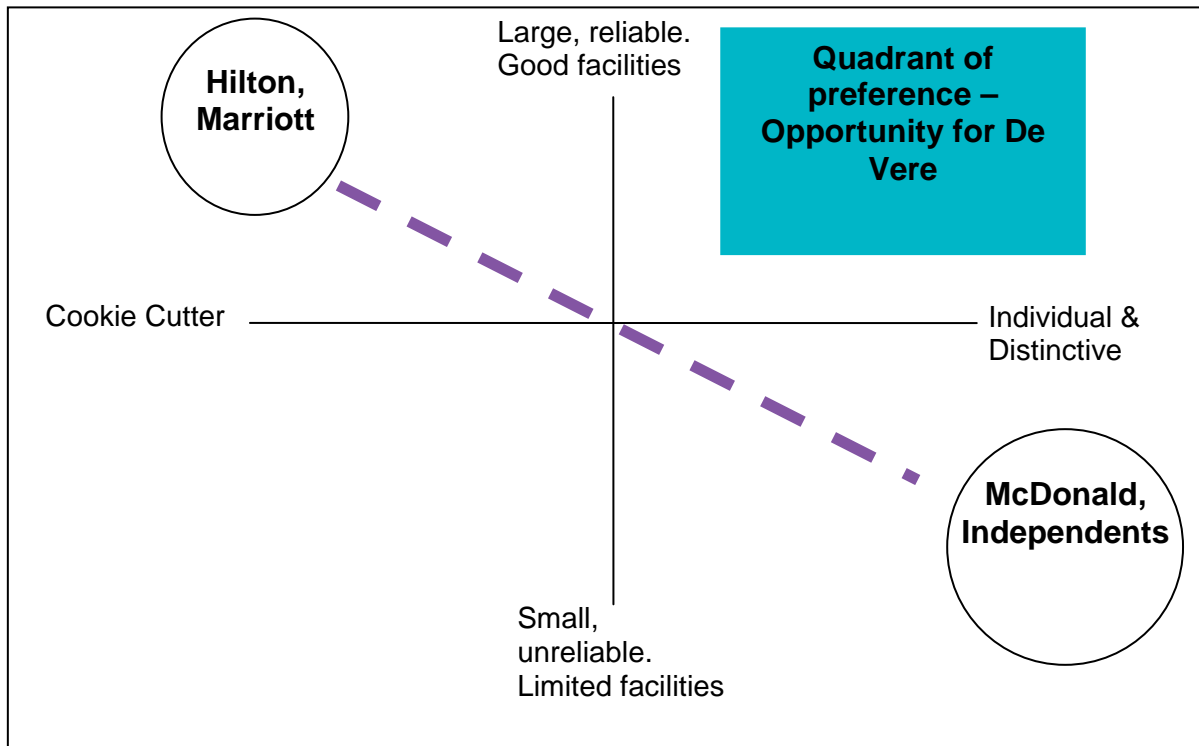
Source: Distributive & Service Trades, June 2009, National Statistics

**Table 4.3 - UK Hotels Industry Segmentation, % Share by Value, 2008**

Category	% Share
Domestic Consumer	68.2
Domestic Business	16.0
International	15.8

Source: Datamonitor, Industry Profile, December 2008

The hotel market is highly fragmented with a small number of large businesses (which also operate diversified portfolios of activities) and many small operations including those with single properties. De Vere Group's revenue of £312 million placed it as the sixth largest operator of hotels in the United Kingdom during 2006 (see Appendix 4) with this representing less than 2% total UK market share. This fragmentation was one of the drivers for the major focus for De Vere, at the time of my research, on clarification of its brands and the communication of these brands to their target customers. The market SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, in Appendix 4, points to other reasons for this concern. The market contains a combination of a small number of large international brands, well understood by consumers, and the diverse array of individual and boutique hotels catering for particular needs. With De Vere neither an international brand nor a boutique, there was a risk of occupying a weak strategic position. This situation has been termed being 'stuck in the middle' (Porter, 1985: 16), a position in the market where a business is neither clearly differentiated from its competition nor the lowest cost provider. Figure 4.1, taken from De Vere's own material, shows how the leadership team intended to turn this middle position to their advantage, offering the interest of individual properties with the consistency and facilities of a bigger chain. This was a core part of the rationale for a drive both on maintaining individuality within each De Vere property as well as seeking commonality and efficiency, where this did not compromise the individuality.

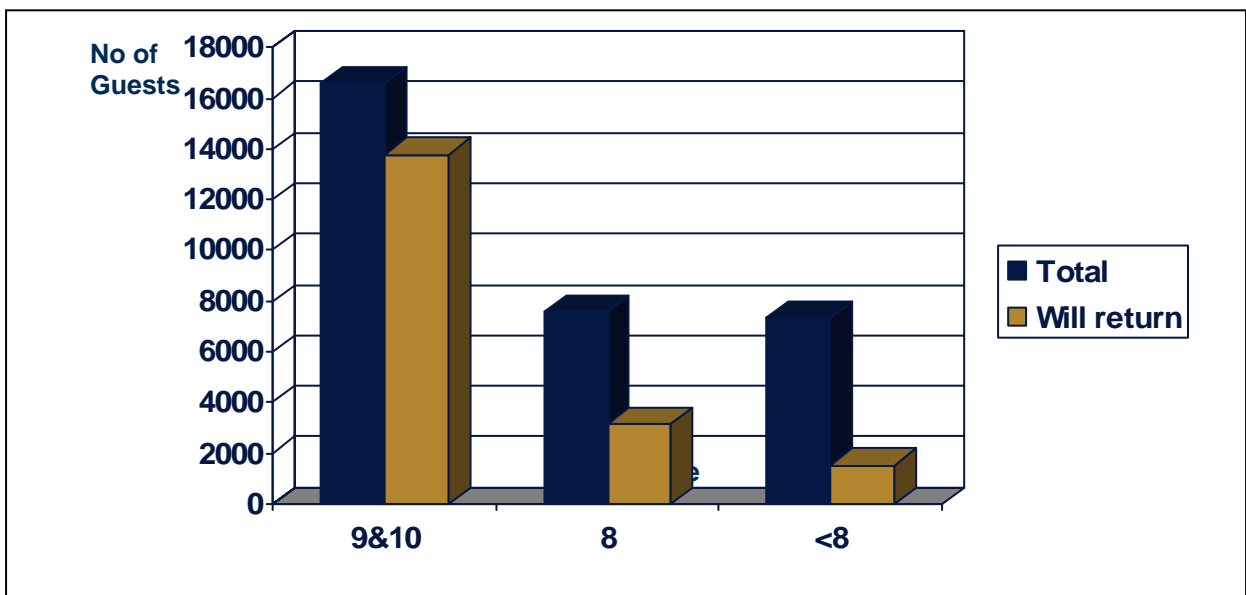


Source: Marketing Department De Vere Group Plc

**Figure 4.1 - Distinctive Positioning of De Vere Compared to Competitors**

Other opportunities identified in the SWOT that were a priority for De Vere included looking for opportunities to divest property ownership as a means of increasing return on capital employed (by maintaining the return and reducing the capital) and as a means of unlocking capital for investment. The Belfry Hotel was the only property in 2006 formerly owned by De Vere, which had been sold and was being operated for the new owners under a management contract by De Vere. The use of other facilities at the hotels as other revenue sources was another focus, particularly with the development of resort properties offering, for example, golf courses. Additional revenue streams were also a central strategy for the Village brand with its 'stand alone' health clubs. The key pressure under the 'threats' for De Vere was one of cost, driven both by competition and price transparency. De Vere were operating a number of efficiency and cost reduction programmes (e.g. *Optima*) during this period, as well as seeking structural efficiencies, for example, through the centralisation of reservations.

A key point of differentiation sought by De Vere during 2006 was on customer service, and this was a central theme of the change programme, *Shine*. The approach was reflected in the programme strap line 'Special People Creating Special Experiences'. Figure 4.2 was used by De Vere as its justification for targeting 'special experiences', ones which go beyond a customer's expectations. Of the customers who scored a 9 or 10 out of 10 on overall satisfaction with their visit, when completing the Guest Satisfaction Survey (GSS), 82% intend to return to a De Vere hotel. This percentage drops dramatically for a score of 8 to 42%. The visit needed to be special (a 9 or 10), not just good (an 8).



Source: Marketing Department De Vere Group Plc

**Figure 4.2 - Impact of Guest Satisfaction Survey (GSS) Score on Return Visits**

In order to achieve something special for customers, De Vere senior management believed frontline employees needed to feel confident to use their own initiative.



#### **4.1.3 De Vere Group Strategy**

The changes at De Vere, during my research, had been heralded by the arrival of a new Chief Executive, in 2003. He marked a break from tradition. At 35 years old, he had spent the previous eight years at Whitbread plc, for the final three of which he was Managing Director of Travel Inn. Prior to this he worked for Nomura International plc in equity derivatives, and for Forte Hotels, having started his career on the graduate training scheme with Pedigree Pet Foods. Arriving at De Vere the new Chief Executive found a business underperforming his expectations. As he put it: “when I joined the business it was quite sleepy, unambitious, parochial company. Disorganised on processes, complacent - that was all the bad stuff. On the positive side, there was a huge amount of pride for working that people had about the business” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 1). This point of view was echoed by others at De Vere Group, reflecting back on the time before the arrival of the Chief Executive one employee describes: “beforehand our performance was to kind of tick along. I think the natural perception was that, as long as we kind of made a bit of money and it was a nice place to work and we looked after our own... that’s why people were here” (De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager, T9: 3-4). The pride of working for De Vere was also reflected in comments from employees: “I’m quite lucky to have gotten the job in De Vere because it is always somewhere I’ve always wanted to work so I was very, very happy” (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T14: 1-2); and “the company... does its best for its customers and staff and they really look after their staff and that is why I have stayed with them for five years because it is great company to work for” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 4).

During the early years of his tenure, the Chief Executive set about making changes, firstly in personnel:

“somewhere around 75% of the [senior leadership] team changed. Of the General Management team, I would say it’s probably 50 to 60% of the General Managers have changed as well so that the shape, the look, the calibre, the feel of the leadership within the organization is very, very different” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 1).

He then focused on strategic direction, as:

“the organization quite incredibly didn’t have a business plan. Didn’t have a strategy, didn’t have a vision literally. I mean it was a complete void. So, there was no sense of directional purpose for the organization as a whole and there was no sense of what the organization was working towards and how it was going to get there.” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 1).

The De Vere Group Marketing Director summarised the new De Vere Group strategy, aimed at filling that void:

“It was a four part strategy... First part was about brand development, which obviously *Shine* was a part of, so this is really about, you know, saying what’s the promise our brand’s made to consumers? Are we delivering that promise consistently and what does that promise mean to be in the marketplace? So it was that whole piece of work of which *Shine* was a part.

The second part of the strategy was around Village and Village roll outs. So we have a very successful, financially successful, performer in Village. We’ve been opening about one a year. You know it made perfect sense to accelerate that, to have a vision for getting to a national brand of 30, 35 hotels to massively increase the pace of those openings and obviously there’s lots of parts to that, including kind of bolstering the support needed to do that, but also actually getting out there and buying sites. So that was part two.

Part three was around De Vere returns. So this was around an acceptance that building De Vere hotels wasn’t a financially viable proposition. At the heart of the whole strategy was a desire to move the brand, move the business towards 10% return. And Village already delivers north of 10% in terms of returns, De Vere doesn’t. And building new De Vere’s wasn’t going to enhance our ability to get to 10%. So the strategy with De Vere was to do two things, firstly to expand the existing hotels where that were feasible with extensions, with new golf courses, new spas that kind of stuff and to try and acquire and grow the brand through management contracts. So this is where someone else owns the hotel, but we effectively manage it for a fee. Clearly in that situation you’ve got income with no asset outlay. So that enhances your returns...

And the third part was kind of about operational excellence. So this was around the particularly processes and systems being frankly kind of antiquated.” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 2)

This internal description of the De Vere Group strategy was reflected publicly in the 2006 Interim Results Statement, which stated that:

“2006 has started satisfactorily, with the business performing ahead of the market despite ongoing external cost pressures. We have made further progress with our four-part strategy, particularly in achieving enhanced sales distribution and cost efficiencies through improved systems, and the continuing rollout of the Village pipeline. The second half performance will be augmented by the new Village openings and bedroom extensions” (Interim Results Statement, 17 May 2006).

As one De Vere Group manager put it: “we’re going through the phases we have to get to a place where De Vere Group as a business can be more successful, can generate better returns, can be a more stable company in terms of its stock market position, the position versus takeovers and things like that” (De Vere Group Organization Development Manager, T6: 2). The shift in the organization of De Vere Group was summarised by the De Vere Hotels Operations Director:

“We have gone from an organization, which was based on the hotel managers running their hotels... with total autonomy and lack of integrated process, except for a very basic level, financial processing systems in terms of payroll and accounting, and a Central Office that was not linked to the business, to one that is much more integrated in terms of the whole business, across hotel and across functional and across central, working together” (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 1).

This lack of ‘integrated processes’ was recognised by managers in the hotels: “coming to De Vere from Marriot, which has got an SOP [Standard Operating Procedure] for everything and it has got a process for everything or you create a process for everything, this is like a blank canvas, there’s nothing, and the hotels are as good as the people running them” (Grand Harbour Guest Services Manager, T22: 10); or more succinctly “if you want to serve cappuccino with froth cream on top, then we can do that” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T57: 13).

## 4.2 *SHINE*

### 4.2.1 The Structure and Objectives of *Shine*

The next challenge taken on by the Chief Executive was one that needed to have an impact on all 7,000 employees of De Vere Group:

“What I'd done in the first year with the team was to create, launch a new vision, launch a strategy; we put people change in place. But the values bit was always a gap” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 5).

After work to define both customer values and corporate values, a change project was initiated to communicate with and to engage the De Vere Group workforce. This became known as *Shine*, which was “setting out to state quite clearly what we’re about, kind of what the deal round here, what we expect of people who work in this business and what we aspire to be as a business” (De Vere Group Organization Development Manager, T6: 6), or as the Human Resources Director (T4: 5) recalled: “it is... what we are to our customers and what we are to ourselves”. The Marketing Director, who was jointly responsible for *Shine* along with the Human Resources Director, connected to the De Vere brands in describing the purpose of *Shine*:

“we set out to get a lot more clarity and focus around what our brands meant for consumers, what our customer experiences felt like. As part of that we needed to shift the culture within the business to align it better to those aspirations. And *Shine* was a process by which we sought, and seek, to shift the culture around the values that we’ve identified” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 6).

He also recognised that to achieve this cultural shift, the programme would need to have an impact throughout the business as the people “who influence the customer experience the most are the people who customers interact with on a day to day basis. Waitresses, waiters, managers in the hotels, they’re the people who influence customer experience” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 18).

I became involved in *Shine* as a consultant in June 2005, tasked to design and deliver a programme of activities to involve everyone and to begin a change in behaviour to deliver improved customer service. The approach involved key

members of the operating board – the Chief Executive, the Operations Directors for each brand, the Marketing Director and the Human Resources Director – as well as a specialist team within the central Human Resources function. *Shine* grew as we worked together: “the whole kind of focus of *Shine* as a programme sort of evolved as we designed it really... It probably started out being more about brand and touch points and ended up being more about values and self, values and leadership and I think where we ended up with it was absolutely right.” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 5). Throughout the design of *Shine*, the focus remained on creating a framework in which individuals could operate autonomously. As the Human Resources Brand Manager for De Vere Hotels (T3: 10) explained:

“We’re not telling people what they should and shouldn’t do. We’re not creating these kind of procedures or manuals about what... you should look like what you should do. Yes, we are sharing best practice and we are rewarding and recognising great achievements and performance around this, but we’re not prescribing and we’re allowing people to use their personalities... and it’s worked. We’ve given them a framework to work in, but we’re also giving... huge amounts of freedom within that framework”.

It was during September and October that *Shine* as a programme was launched to the rest of De Vere Group, with the delivery of five 2½ day events to hotel or leisure club General Managers and their teams. At each event there were six or seven General Managers, accompanied by their leadership teams typically comprising an Operations Manager, Revenue Manager, Finance Manager, Human Resources Manager, Leisure Manager and Sales Manager. Each event typically had 70 participants and was led by the Chief Executive and his team. These kick-off sessions were followed by five further two-day ‘skills building’ training with groups of the General Managers and their HR or Operations Managers, equipping each of them to lead a four hour ‘cascade’ workshop with all their hotel staff. The timetables for each of these sessions are included in Appendix 5. In January 2006, I ran additional launch and skills building events for 6 hotels, which had been held back from the original programme. Each of these hotels – all part of the luxury De Vere

brand – had a General Manager who had been appointed within the previous three months. My work as a consultant on *Shine* had finished after the January workshops were delivered, though I was continuing to work for De Vere Group on a project to build a competency model for General Managers and Operations Managers.

In keeping with the *Shine* approach of empowering the hotel General Managers to make the programme their own, each hotel began to develop activities that extended beyond the workshops. At the Royal Bath for example:

“we now have a *Shine* birthday lunches every month... and then we have *Shine* employee of the month... there’s also *Shine* meetings which we hold once a month as well. So they run for about half an hour to an hour and we just go through sort of like the financial figures, GSS [Guest Satisfaction Survey]... and there’s sort of like quizzes and people can win sort of bottles of wine” (Royal Bath Human Resources Assistant, T51: 7).

The aim was for *Shine* to become a way of working, and not a one-off event run by head office.

#### **4.2.2 The Impact of *Shine***

The immediate experience of the *Shine* events was significant for those involved in running them:

“I remember very vividly, the feeling at the end of the first workshop when we had half an hours turn around for the next one. But it was one of huge elation because we’d kind of struggled and struggled then got through it and the response from the delegates was better than I could possibly have dreamt for. So it was you know I felt hugely proud of the team that I had working with me and you know I just didn't think that we could kind of pull it off and Carl here was highly appreciative and gave me a kiss, it was fantastic” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 7-8).

There was a similar reaction for those attending:

“I remember when we all came out of that *Shine* course, everyone was buzzing. Everyone was really buzzing. So, that was really good” (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T32: 10).

There were some immediate benefits noted:

“one of the main things is being within a training session where there was a whole range of people from different departments there, which people you wouldn’t necessarily see on a day to day basis because obviously with shift work and things like that, those of us who work in the office don’t see the people there that work operationally” (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T14: 4).

However, not everyone described the experience so positively. For example, a Royal Bath Porter (T46: 4) saw *Shine* as an attempt by managers to make their staff do more, he had the opinion that: “it is just like pushing people to do...to try harder, and it’s nothing at all”. For another individual it was a perceived lack of action after the event that was the focus of their concern: “*Shine*, it was just the one initial course then that was it. There wasn’t any follow up or anything” (Royal Bath Assistant Guest Services Manager, T54: 10). Another employee simply questioned the impact: “I can see the thought behind it, it’s just how successful it was operationally is debatable” (Royal Bath Food Controller, T48: 7).

As well as initial reactions to *Shine* there were examples of changes that people attributed to the programme. Some were symbolic, for example at Grand Harbour after each session those attending were presented with a small, gold star shaped lapel badge, an initiative taken by the General Manager, and these became very popular, as summarised by the Grand Harbour Sales Manager (T29: 7):

“you see everybody walking around with their gold stars on, that, to me, just tells you what *Shine*... normally, people don’t put on these badges and stuff, it doesn’t mean anything to them, but everybody’s really proud to wear those. It’s like a statement, a symbol that you’ve been, you’ve attended, and you are... *Shine*.”

Other interviewees described changes in behaviour, for instance:

“I used to walk here, and as I’m in this corridor, you could see members of the staff not acknowledging each other before, and now, although they are only casual, they actually salute each other. There is much

more awareness of being a team” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 9).

As well as such specific changes, the ‘buzz’ created was referred to by several interviewees, including the Human Resources Brand Manager for De Vere Hotels (T3: 2). Referring to a visit to one of her hotels after the *Shine* workshops had been run, he recalled: “it’s just like walking into a totally different building, it’s absolutely fantastic, the buzz around there”. This ‘buzz’ was frequently supported by stories of change: “we’ve got some really, really kind of fantastic stories that have happened out in the business” (De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 2).

#### **Small Story 4.1 - Stories of Changes following *Shine*.**

##### **The Chief Executive’s Story: Special Customer Experiences**

“To be honest, some of the stories we get are kind of clichéd, sort of the old chestnuts and we do struggle especially with this special customer experiences about what does that look like because people sort of think that special has to be big and stunning and out of the ordinary... Just after they’d done the *Shine* event... the maid was at the room, there’s a dirty smelly football kit in the corner and she sees it and she goes in the next day and it’s still there. So she actually took it, went to the hotel laundry herself and hand washed it and ironed it and put it back in the guest’s room. Put a little note on it saying, hope you don’t mind I’ve washed your football kit, I saw it lying on the corner, Janet from housekeeping or whatever. And the guest was just absolutely blown away by this because he’d been away on business for four days and he played football on a Tuesday night and it was just stuck in the corner... I think where we are now is trying to get across to people that special might just be about doing the right small things consistently all the time” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 12).

##### **The HR Brand Manager’s Story: ‘Making the Customers Feel Special’**

“I was in the elevator at the time with the individual... didn’t have a clue who I was and it was a concierge guy who was on the lift. He was in the lift with a customer... he said ‘how’s your stay?’ ‘Yeah my stay’s good’. He said ‘good? so... what would make your stay great’... ‘if I had a bottle of champagne in the room’. He said ‘right ok’. And



they laughed about it and then the customer got out of the lift. And I... introduced myself and I said that was great what you just did. He said... next time he comes next week I'm going to have a bottle of champagne waiting in his room just to wow him... What's made you decide to suddenly be able to do that? And he said well you know before I was very much, I just come to work and I do my job, I wouldn't really think an awful lot about the customers, I knew I had a task to do. And he said over the last couple of months we've been through various things... where now I understand what part I play in making the customer journey throughout this hotel. And I know if I touch them in my area and they're touched in every area that they go through within their journey then actually their stay is going to be really memorable... I know now that I've got the autonomy to do it and to make a difference and be able to do that, if I'm totally honest before even though I probably did have the autonomy, nobody had said it was around making the customers feel special and about making the customer journey. It was around coming to work and doing a good job, which is what I thought I was doing but I wasn't actually having anything to do with the customers or what we were there to deliver...

I was speaking with the HR manager... and the guy in concierge had been with us for years and years and years and had been at one stage last year on final written warning for performance, he just wasn't doing anything above what he should be doing and since the whole kind of *Shine* process... he's just taken on a new lease of life really with things. So they've had something like 10% of the compliments that come in that month were about him which was fantastic" (De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 8-10).

#### **The General Manager's Story: A Special Proposal**

"You know the couple who booked a balcony and we didn't have it, the booking for the balcony, so we gave them a normal room and he said, look I don't want... the reason I wanted a balcony was to propose to my fiancé, so we said no problem, so we put him on a dinner table out on the leisure club veranda where it was closed and served him dinner and he proposed to her there" (Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 7).

These ‘small stories’ were supported by changes in the employee satisfaction survey (Insights)<sup>21</sup> results, and the Guest Satisfaction Survey (GSS)<sup>22</sup>. Firstly the GSS scores: “since *Shine* has happened there’s been a direct relation of an upswing within the GSS scores to a real positive. It’s been the highest it’s been in two years which is fantastic and also from a conference and events perspective as well, that same thing has happened there” (De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 2). This ‘upswing’ did not happen immediately, in fact there initially was a fall in guest satisfaction, which was rationalised the De Vere Hotels Operations Director (T10: 8):

“practically we had thousands of people out of the business being trained and while that was happening, Joe was not getting his cup of coffee in the lounge every time and the GMs were spending all that time in a meeting-room or in an environment delivering training; not customer facing and I am sure had an effect.”

The customer satisfaction improvement was noticed at Grand Harbour: “our GSS has gone up considerably if we use the measurement that we use ... we’re starting to see less and less of people’s issues, things are starting to run a lot more smoothly” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T21: 3-6). There was also a rise in employee satisfaction, measured through Insights: “in February, we did a poll on our Insights just to see how things had impacted since *Shine*. There’s already been a 6 point shift since September... and they’re expecting another at least 6 point shift for the end of year” (De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 5). The General Manager at Grand Harbour made a direct link between *Shine* and the key performance indicators: “payroll is fantastic, from thirty-five percent to twenty-nine percent; so, it’s a six percent decrease on payroll, and yet, we’re making more sales, we’re making more profit, we get less letter of complaints but more compliments” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 16).

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<sup>21</sup> Insights, the De Vere Group employee satisfaction survey was sent annually to all employees. Following *Shine* it was redesigned to include specific measures relating to the corporate values. The same format of questionnaire was used to carry out ad-hoc assessments or ‘pulse-checks’ throughout the year.

<sup>22</sup> The Guest Satisfaction Survey (GSS) was completed through questionnaires left in Guest’s bedrooms and returned to the hotel General Manager. The data was collated monthly and was one of the formal measures of performance of each hotel in the group.

#### 4.3 THE IMPACT OF THE AHG TAKEOVER

The takeover of De Vere Group Plc by the Alternative Hotel Group (AHG) began to have a practical impact in September 2006. As the General Manager at the Grand Harbour (T30: 1) explained:

“the one that really showed the reality was when we went to Bolton in September. At that point, when we arrived, we were taken into our separate rooms... to meet the new owners, and at another point, we were told that [the De Vere Operations Director] was not part of the set-up anymore, so, there was a lot of uncertainty. And then, we had this afternoon where [the Chief Executive] ... quite inspirational ... you can see where he’s coming from, he was telling us his ideas of where the company wanted to go and then introduced himself and the owners. From that point, it’s been very much about changing”.

The move into private ownership was a subject of concern to many in the hotels: “whether it’s going to be still a hotel thing, or whether they’re just going to be out to make money” (Grand Harbour Switchboard Operator, T24: 10). In the early months of AHG ownership, however, there were few changes at hotel level:

“well, nothing, for months, all we kept seeing were emails saying, ‘This guy is going, that guy is going, this has been centralised’ and that was the first month. We’ve seen absolutely no changes apart from people getting made redundant, that was the only thing the hotel seen because there’s nothing going on anywhere, and just loads and loads of closed-door meetings between all the senior teams, people coming in, doors closing, whispers” (Royal Bath Food Service Manager, T59: 10).

There were numerous changes in General Managers, including the General Manager at the Royal Bath in January 2007. Each hotel was also given a target to reach for payroll costs, leading to redundancies at all levels in the hotels in the last months of 2006, which had a lasting effect into 2007: “it is quite scary really because I think everybody is probably thinking it, ‘Is my job safe?’” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 17). By the early months of 2007 the early lack of impact in the hotels of the new owners was beginning to be perceived differently:

“I don’t think people realised quite how much of a change all of a sudden being owned by eight men that have a completely different

view on business and whole kind of company, was really going to affect us ... It's very customer focused considering it's a private company, and it's their money, and it's their profit. They do seem to care about customer service. And, if it means them throwing money at things to improve things for the customer, then they are quite happy to do that, which did surprise me" (Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager, T60: 4).

The speed of decision making was frequently remarked upon, and the imposition of centrally made decisions on the hotels. The introduction of a Food and Beverage Director, replacing the role of Executive Chef, into each hotel was one specific example, as described by the Grand Harbour Sales Manager (T29: 15): "I think their decision in regards to the removal of the Executive Chef ... was spoken about at one point, and then the decision was... handed out to the GM to tell them within a week and a half."

One specific area of impact was the replacement of *Shine* with a new centrally managed programme, *Verve Service*. In *Verve Service* the "General Manager has to nominate five people to be Ambassadors to go away on these sessions... the idea behind it is not to sit there and tell us how they believe it should be, but that they get our minds working and get us to see other people that are out there in different businesses" (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T24: 13). This caused some confusion in the hotels:

"I think *Shine* was good, and I don't see, why you couldn't use *Shine*?" (Grand Harbour Room Service Manager, T27: 15);

"The only thing I heard was when we did *Verve Service*, they said, 'This is just another *Shine*' and it wasn't really very positive" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 13);

"Basically *Verve* is the new *Shine*" (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 9).

However, there was also excitement and anticipation, as expressed by the Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager (T54: 10): "it's like being confident and stuff like that. It's all about developing yourself and doing the right thing for the customer... Hopefully, this might be a bit more successful [than *Shine*]. I

think this is actually going to run for a lot longer". The specific focus of the Verve approach, taking a key part of the customer journey for each session, was seen as beneficial by some: "the big thing that they are looking at is the welcome... How we improve how guests are welcomed at the front door by the porters, by reception, and then sort of extending that into how they are welcomed at breakfast and into the bar" (Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager, T60: 4). By November 2007 the momentum was already being lost:

"It is a shame because we were really getting some of it there and I thought some of the statements... are actually quite simple and very good and we are actually getting some progress with them. So, that stopped" (Royal Bath General Manager, T64: 7).

#### **4.4 CHANGE AT THE HOTELS**

##### **4.4.1 Grand Harbour**

Located in Southampton, this modern hotel has a striking glass atrium structure and provides views over the town's Historic Old Walls and Waterfront. Its location offers the leisure guest a short drive to the New Forest and the beaches of Bournemouth, Boscombe and Christchurch. At the end of 2007 Grand Harbour had a total of 244 employees, across 19 departments, and had been open since September 1994. It was the only 5 star hotel in the town and its fine dining restaurant had been awarded two AA rosettes. It also offered a more informal restaurant and light snacks at the bar. Grand Harbour can hold conferences from 5 - 500 people and other facilities include a fully equipped gym, sauna, steam room, solarium, swimming pool and children's splash pool. There are four beauty treatment rooms and a relaxation area, all of which support the Grand Harbour's 173 rooms. The De Vere Marketing Director (T8: 17) summed up the Grand Harbour: "they've got a fundamentally a very nice product. Although it's one that is a bit odd in the sense that how many five star hotels do you really need in Southampton and should it really be a five star hotel and it kind of isn't an obvious thing for you to have?"

The General Manager was appointed at Grand Harbour at the beginning of 2006. He was hired from Marriott Hotels, where he had worked alongside the current De Vere Chief Executive. The De Vere Hotels Operations Director described the Grand Harbour's performance during the first half of 2006: "the market is definitely down and [the General Manager's] profit and sales performance outperforms the market even though it's not where we need to be" (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 13). The expectations on the General Manager were high from Central Office:

"I think [the General Manager] is a guy who's got a lot of capability and a lot of vision and a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of personal magnetism and I think he will lead that team through it and out the other side." (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 17).

The General Manager saw for himself the opportunity to reposition the hotel in the local market: "It was very clear to me that was never a corporate transient. It was always a conference and event transient hotel with leisure on the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday" (Grand Harbour General Manager, T39: 9). I had my own first impressions of Grand Harbour, and the new General Manager.

#### **Vignette 4.1 – First Impressions**

It seems as if I have been following the signs to the seafront for too long. The town doesn't feel the sort of place to have a seafront anyway, and looking around all I can see is dual carriageways and transport containers, patiently waiting dockside. The Grand Harbour, one of the few five star hotels in the De Vere portfolio, rises suddenly in front of me, incongruously protruding from a large retail park. No grand harbour in sight. The marble cladding of this modern monolith glints in the spring sunshine as I walk towards the doorman, who looks as if he has been transported from the Savoy or the Dorchester in his formal green and gold get up. He does his best to avoid eye contact as I stride past, already a few minutes late. The marble continues through into the reception, where after a quick, polite exchange with the dark haired receptionist – whose calm demeanour remained intact as I announced importantly I had an appointment with the General Manager – I was now sitting. Waiting.

Surrounded by glass cabinets, selling expensive watches and jewellery. Who buys this stuff? Who stays at a five star hotel in this town?

My wandering mind returns to my purpose for the day. The first set of interviews. It hadn't struck me up to that point, that I am here as a researcher – perhaps I should have dressed differently. I spend my working life visiting people and places unknown to me, part of the excitement and fear of being a consultant, and the required behaviours are now second nature. But how does a researcher behave? Before I can answer, I see the General Manager gracefully traversing the reception towards me. Everything that the General Manager does has grace. He is immaculately dressed, his suits, shirts and ties chosen with that touch of Italian flair. His jacket is buttoned, hair groomed and he has an air of relaxed calm about him. He is a truly charming man and I can't help but begin to judge him as an exceptional General Manager. Recently hired from Marriott, where his personal style would have been underpinned by the routines and rigour of the large hotel chain, I was excited to hear his first impressions of his new charge, after less than six months in the job. The General Manager insists we have coffee first – I have to fight hard to turn down breakfast too, negotiating him down to a small pastry. We sit in the bar, under a glass atrium tapering to a point, seven or eight floors above my head, and Marco strikes up an easy conversation. This is going to be fun, that voice in my head quips with a smile. But something is distracting Marco. He repeatedly glances past my left shoulder; something else is on Marco's mind. He apologises. Rises, folding his napkin neatly beside a barely touched espresso and crosses purposefully to the bar. His tone is calm and measured as he explains to the barman that the floor has not been cleaned under the foot rail at the bar and he would appreciate it if the barman could call housekeeping and ask them to complete their work immediately...

The General Manager inherited an organization with problems, while there were some strong teams, these teams did not work well together: “when I started here I think it was like every department was really quite close and there was no like teamwork between departments, everything was like ‘oh that’s mine, that’s yours’” (Grand Harbour Restaurant Supervisor, T19: 2). The source of this lack of teamwork was directed towards the previous General

Manager: “they have come from a GM who was very lackadaisical with them, let them get on with it, didn’t appear very much, who just let the boat row, which is why we’re in the state we are in certain areas” (Grand Harbour Guest Services Manager, T22: 15). The new General Manager used *Shine* as his major intervention to bring about a change in the way of working at Grand Harbour, and it quickly became clear to him, and his Operations Manager, that not all the Heads of Department were competent:

“a group of HODs and Executives sat there and were divided into two groups and there was a group that you could look at the people and think you’re going to be part of this team moving forward and the other group were the group unfortunately that had the question marks and weren’t buying into what we just spent the day doing and those question marks are slowly one by one, deciding to move on and it’s actually quite strange to think so early on you could see in front of you, who’s going to be in it and who’s going to jump ship” (Grand Harbour Operations Manager, T20: 1).

The result was significant changes in personnel: “the turnover for managers was probably ninety percent, in our first twelve months” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 10). On my first visit to Grand Harbour in May 2006 the General Manager and Operations Manager were struggling to find suitable replacements, though were holding themselves back from the temptation to take the people who were available, and were waiting for the ideal candidate. Later the General Manager reflected:

“it has been a long journey of finding the right managers, the right leadership that is not only capable of looking after the people, but also capable of delivering the business acumen we require. We had a lot of coaching sessions to find that. We decided to do a “Lead to *Shine*” session that was aimed for managers only every two weeks, every Friday, three hour session” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 10).

The restructuring of the management of Grand Harbour was recognised within the hotel: “I think one of [the General Manager’s] and [the Operations Manager’s] big things when they first arrived at the hotel was to rather make the management less because there seemed to be a lot of management and not enough people to do the work” (Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, T38: 5).



Following the AHG takeover all the hotels were set a target to reduce the cost of their payroll as a percentage of their revenue. The resultant redundancies were seen as well handled by some of those involved:

“they made it very clear they were there if we needed to talk, for any support; they took us off privately and just sat with us and would say, ‘How are you feeling today? Is there anything you want to talk about? Anything we can help you with...’, I’ve got a list of hotels that have job offers and a list of places in general that that have jobs” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 12).

This was followed by further structural changes, with the centralisation of reservations (a continuation of an approach begun by De Vere Group prior to the takeover), and the ‘clustering’ of Human Resources, that was the creation of regional HR teams rather than dedicated on site support. This raised anxiety at Grand Harbour:

“we’ve got rid of reservations; HR is going regionalised, but I just know from my past experience this mightn’t be the end. I can see finance; I can see accounts going regionalised. I could, even, possibly, see the General Manager getting regionalised, because I’ve experienced that before” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 26).

The rebranding of the group by AHG also brought further consternation, with the Grand Harbour initially placed in the mid-range Heritage brand, before being subsequently promoted to Deluxe: “when they put us all into the three different areas, nobody could understand why we were in Heritage and not in Deluxe. So that raised a lot of questions, but now obviously we are in Deluxe, so I think everybody is a bit more comfortable now because they feel that we sort of where we belong” (Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, T38: 9). Looking back over this time the General Manager’s Personal Assistant, summarised the experience (T36: 1): “we had a struggling year when [the General Manager] first came. There was a lot of unease, we made redundancies, everything changed and then we got taken over. But, we sort of went from strength, to strength, to strength, which has been good.”

#### 4.4.2 Royal Bath

Royal Bath is positioned on the Bournemouth sea front, with spectacular panoramic views across the bay and out to the English Channel. With its grand Victorian frontage, the hotel retains many traditional features as well as all the latest amenities. At the end of 2007 the Royal Bath had 101 contracted employees and 47 casual employees. It was opened on the 28 June 1838, the day Queen Victoria was crowned. The 140 bedrooms are supported by 8 conference and banqueting suites, with the ability to cater for 4 – 400 people, an indoor heated swimming pool, spa bath, steam room, sauna, fully equipped gymnasium and beauty treatment room.

The reality of the Royal Bath was somewhat different from its heritage. The De Vere Group Marketing Director summarised: “the product is desperately out of date in pretty much every sense of the word... it needs a clear vision of the future. It needs a plan for what we can do with it.” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 17). More succinctly: “Royal Bath, I mean that’s like a dinosaur coming into a kind of space age” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T5: 3). The root of the problem was sustained underinvestment in the property, and “a building of this age that has been neglected as far as investment for a long, long time” (Royal Bath Maintenance Manager, T49: 9), was going to cause problems. These problems were noticeable to the guests:

“a lot of the complaints, on sort of like the GSS and things, are still the rooms and because they are sort of fairly old, I think, well, not fairly old, but they haven’t been renovated that recently and I think a lot of people feel a bit sort of let down by the rooms” (Sarah, Royal Bath Human Resources Assistant, T51: 14).

Though there was a belief amongst some of the managers that: “this building can be falling apart, if you have the right people in the right place, what is falling down does not matter, because we can get around it” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T65: 10).

This was the challenge for the new General Manager, who was “an experienced General Manager, never worked in a Resort environment in his life, always worked in London transient environment.” (De Vere Hotels Operations Manager, T10: 13). For the General Manager, the timing of his arrival with the rollout of *Shine* was an opportunity, which he expressed to his boss, the Operations Director, “he told me that *Shine* was the best thing that’s ever happened in his career, in terms of a launch into a new hotel” (De Vere Hotels Operations Manager, T10: 13). The Operations Director went on to describe the General Manager at Royal Bath as a “bit of a street fighter. He is enjoying, I believe, the challenge ... He’s got an awful product, the worst, arguably the worst product, in the company” (De Vere Hotels Operations Manager, T10: 13). The Royal Bath, while different in many ways from the Grand Harbour, was operating in a similar market, with customers coming from “predominantly conference. It’s the main segment. It’s our main revenue generator because, without conference, we are not going to fill the restaurants or the function space. Then leisure is our second market. Corporate is just a minor, minor market for us” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 9). Royal Bath’s history was perhaps its greatest asset, yet it was not just the physical state of repair that represented a challenge:

“The Royal Bath has got quite a big heritage and it’s very stuffy in the town and we don’t want to be like that... Locals will not come in this hotel because they just, they’re just scared of it” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 37).

#### **Vignette 4.2 – More First Impressions**

The General Manager at Royal Bath wears a suit in the same way as I do. Whereas his counterpart at Grand Harbour, looked as if he had stepped out of a catalogue, pressed and ready for action, by coffee time the Royal Bath General Manager and I look as if we have slept in ours. Neither of us are untidy, just a little lived in. The Royal Bath shares that lived in look. Once a striking Victorian seafront retreat (and they do have a proper – and very long - seafront as the General Manager and I found out jogging its length in the evening sun) it is now showing its age. The modern artwork does little to disguise sustained wear and tear. None of this is dampening the General Manager's enthusiasm for his new baby, as we sit in the huge central lounge

looking out over the pretty gardens. Once again I have managed to delicately turn down offers of food and I sip slowly my decaffeinated coffee. Now a confident researcher after a full two days in the Grand Harbour, I am keen to get to work as the General Manager explains he has put me in the 'Captain's Cabin' for the day. Approached through a very narrow corridor the Captain's Cabin is a small circular room, at the top of a turret on the rear of the hotel and has a stunning view of the sea, with promenading holidaymakers bustling along, ice creams at the ready. It is a remarkable place to work, and I can't believe it hasn't been sold to a paying client. "We had to stop using it for customers", the General Manager explained, "after a rather generously proportioned lady got stuck in the corridor on her way in!" My first story collected, I settled into the cabin thankful my resolve for avoiding full breakfasts had held...

While there were obvious contrasts between Royal Bath and Grand Harbour, and between their General Managers, there were many similarities in the major changes imposed on the hotels from outside. These changes included the reduction in payroll costs through employee redundancies:

"The redundancy process of reviewing all those to save the payroll and how we achieved that was up to us, so, we reviewed our whole structure because we had vacant positions" (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T57: 3).

The centralisation of reservations in Warrington, rather than locally in Bournemouth:

"[When you call reservations] you are not hearing the seagulls in the background. You are hearing cars on the M6" (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 5).

The appointment of a Food and Beverage Director:

"He is from the Simpson's on the Strand" (Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager, T60: 18).

The reorganization of Human Resources:

"We've gone from three fulltime members of staff to one fulltime member staff and HR department have centralised" (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 3).

The Royal Bath was positioned as a Deluxe property in the rebranding of the portfolio of properties, further exacerbating the possible difference between customer expectations and the product delivered. However, there were strong feelings as to the potential of the hotel:

“they have only six properties in De Vere Deluxe. I think this hotel has got to be the gold mine, having this location, town, the beach, you know Bournemouth is an up and coming holiday destination. So, I think if they make it like a good product then they would make loads of money. They’ve got to, really. But, I think it’s going to take a long time. I think it’s going to be a good two years, with the changes now which is starting to happen operationally” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 4).

AHG announced plans for a £20 million investment to refurbish the Royal Bath before the end of 2006, bringing both excitement and trepidation to the managers in Bournemouth: “I think next year will be a year of chaos, scaffolding, complaints, and nightmare” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 20). However, there were further plot twists in the Royal Bath story to come.

The first, announced in January 2007, was the replacement of the General Manager. He had been called to a meeting in Warrington on a Monday morning to be told and then: “I literally got a train back on Monday. Got my car, drove down to Bournemouth, cleared my desk. A lot of people stayed around to say goodbye and I’d already left” (Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 15). This was the next step in a succession of changes in the leadership at Royal Bath, as the Operations Manager recounted:

“[the new General Manager] is my fourth GM in three years. The first one left the business, for one reason or another, which I kind of agree with; the second one was an interim GM, he was a great guy, for two months, a month; the third one ... again, great GM; and [the current GM’s] the fourth” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T57: 8).

A key part of the new General Manager’s background was his experience in hotel refurbishment. However, it was not long before problems appeared with the investment: “when they say it’s going to start in April, and then it’s going to start in June, and then it’s going to be October... it’s a bit

discouraging, I'll be honest" (Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 3). By the time of my final visit to Royal Bath in November 2007, the General Manager had bad news:

"We were all set to go. I must have had a dozen planning meetings. So, it is very disappointing...it is never going to be cancelled, but it is postponed" (Royal Bath General Manager, T64: 1).

The replacement General Manager was already beginning to question what the future might hold: "my gut feel is, sell us and give us to somebody who would invest some money" (Royal Bath General Manager, T64: 5).

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

One of the initial aims of my research project was to follow the progress of *Shine* after the formal intervention by Central Office. As this chapter has shown, *Shine* was launched into a sea of other changes, becoming intertwined with the introduction of new General Managers, a change in ownership, prior and subsequent change 'programmes', as well as the ongoing turbulence of daily operational hotel life. The Grand Harbour and the Royal Bath faced many similar challenges, approaching them in their own idiosyncratic ways under the guidance and leadership of two contrasting General Managers. The next three chapters replay the experiences of those working in these two hotels, as well as in head office, as they seek to make sense of the often paradoxical nature of the changes they faced.



## 5. STORIES ABOUT ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The opening question in my first round of interviews was ‘What sort of changes have you seen in your time here?’ I chose it as a straight-forward question, to allow interviewees to begin to tell their story of change. It turned out to be the start of the emergence of differing views on, not only the amount of change that had taken place in De Vere Group, but also the nature of change itself. The stories told during my interviews provided examples of the notions of both episodic and continuous change (Weick & Quinn, 1999). According to Weick and Quinn, ‘episodic change’: “is used to group together organizational changes that tend to be infrequent, discontinuous, and intentional” (Weick & Quinn, 1999: 365). In contrast: ‘continuous change’: “is used to group together organizational changes that tend to be ongoing, evolving, and cumulative” (Weick & Quinn, 1999: 375).

Episodic change was referred to, most often, by my interviewees as ‘change as an event’, and the focus of this type of change was on a particular intervention, an episode in the continuing organizational story. With *Shine*, this conception of change brought the focus of attention, from the managers and employees of De Vere, on to the launch events or cascade workshops. These events were described as an unusual or abnormal feature, causing an interruption to a stable or constant organizational life. Stability was said to be normal; change out of the ordinary. In contrast, both managers and employees also referred to the need for change to be ongoing. With *Shine*, interviewees told stories about the use of the corporate values as a guide to daily changes in behaviour, to suit different situations and contexts. While these conceptions of change may be thought of as alternatives, both were present in the stories of change told by members of De Vere Group, and both were used in making sense of the experiences of change.



### Small Story 5.1 – ‘Change happens in two ways’

“In this hotel change happens in two ways. Either overnight, radical change or it’s a long, drawn out process. Two examples for you: one change that happened was in the interim between [General Managers], which was about less than a month, we had the Bars Manager leaving and a new one employed. Literally I came off two days off and it was a decision and the same idea with the One Restaurant Manager, which I’m not saying is a bad or good thing. But it’s gone from one ... extreme to another. Then if I have a look at ... one of the guys that works for me. He’s one of my Shift Leaders and he’s been wanting to progress for a little while and there have been numerous amounts of meetings and when I say it’s been going on since before September last year and it’s only now just going to come into effect beginning of this year. So it happens in extremes” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T45: 14).

As this ‘small story’ illustrates, both contradictory notions of change, episodic and continuous, were in evidence in some of the stories told. Though, while the Front of House Manager is using the language of these differing conceptions of change, his examples could be challenged as being very similar, only taking place with different degrees of urgency, or perhaps viewed from different organizational standpoints. Furthermore, within each story of change, whichever notion of change was most evident, there were rich descriptions of other aspects of organizational change, including: resistance; the impact of the pace of speed of change;

Senior and middle managers talked about change as something that they sought to initiate, suggesting an episodic notion of change. However, they also typically described ongoing, continuous change as a desired outcome. Managers saw themselves as the primary, legitimate instigators of change, setting the direction for where they wanted the organization to be, yet concerned to avoid dependency on their actions for continuing adaptation to this destination. Senior managers were less able to describe their role in promoting an environment where change was embraced as a natural, ongoing

phenomenon. For employees, the 'recipients' of this managerially initiated change, their stories of their experiences were less clear. Some employees described little change in their working lives, focusing more on stability, while those who recognised changes in the organization used both episodic and continuous descriptions. The resulting picture of the experience of organizational change was a complex and messy one. This chapter has focused on capturing the diversity of stories told, perhaps, to the detriment of a coherent, compelling single narrative.

One clear pattern was the greater impact of *Shine* at Grand Harbour, than at Royal Bath. It was perhaps at Grand Harbour that the management team had been able to identify a role for themselves in promoting continuous change. This was reflected, not only in the stories told about *Shine*, but in the alterations in working relationships described by managers and employees at Grand Harbour. While these common stories emerged, the dominant view of change in De Vere was one of multiple activities, events and shifts in language or behaviour, made sense of idiosyncratically by individuals.

The manifestations of episodic and continuous change are explored further in the following sections of this chapter, after a brief summary of stories of stability (5.2). Stories about episodic change are introduced (5.3) and then explored further by examining specific change events during my fieldwork (5.4). Continuous change is introduced (5.5) and followed by further analysis, presenting how interviewees described the ongoing or continuous outcomes of changes at De Vere Group (5.6), in terms of changes to language and behaviour and changes in working relationships. The primary focus throughout this chapter is on how managers and employees in De Vere conceived of organizational change. Other important stories on resistance and power are discussed in subsequent chapters.

## 5.2 STABILITY

There were interviewees primarily who experienced the organization as stable. Some people suggested that they had seen no substantial change, during their time at De Vere:

“As the saying goes, ‘same shit, and different day.’ I think with regard to that and to the running of the hotel, really, they might have tightened up on one or two [things] policy [or] procedure wise and my department, zero change. Maybe it was just a little bit of wording here or whatever, but in essence, we do what we have been doing since I started in this position” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T65: 7);

“nothing really has been changed dramatically to completely change what I do on the daily basis ... we still get the same conference inquiries and group inquiries as they did before” (Grand Harbour Reception Supervisor, T34: 3).

For others, stability was described as a desired state. For example, the General Manager’s Personal Assistant at Grand Harbour, talked about wanting everything to ‘just stay still’:

“I think everything needs to just settle down, I think that’s the thing, everything needs to just stay still for a while; we don’t need anymore movement, we don’t need anymore restructuring” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 27).

For the Room Service Supervisor, also working at Grand Harbour, change was something that could be endured or perhaps ignored:

“I would like to think people can rise above the change, because the people in this business are very resilient” (Grand Harbour Room Service Supervisor, T27: 27)

*Shine* was not an instigator of change for some: “I don’t think I’ve made any changes” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T44: 9); neither was the AHG takeover for others: “It’s changed in some respects in that you have had to work harder; operation-wise not much at all” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T66: 9). One De Vere Group Learning and Development Partner (T1: 30) suggested that change was confined to senior management: “I think that most of the change really does affect the senior people within the business. I think that the guys that are still waiting on tables and cleaning bedrooms are

just kind of getting on with it”, an idea supported by others: “I do not really know how it would affect the staff” (Grand Harbour Food and Beverage Controller, T42: 4).

There was even stability as an objective of the De Vere change programme: “*Shine* was setting out to almost be the glue that holds us together” (Edith, De Vere Group Organization Development Manager, T6: 6). However, the majority of stories told were of change and the next section beginning with those that considered change as episodic.

### **5.3 EPISODIC CHANGE**

#### **5.3.1 Isolated Events**

When faced with my opening interview question, asking about experiences of change in De Vere, some interviewees recalled changes that were very tangible, physical alterations:

“We’ve had ... physical changes in that we’ve had refurbishment within the hotel and the product that we have to sell has got better and makes our lives a bit easier when we’re trying to sell it” (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T14: 2).

Or the introduction of new equipment or technology:

“This new telephone system that we’ve had installed, I don’t feel I’ve got the rapport [with customers], anymore, because ... they’d ring up and they’ve known me – my voice – and that sort of thing. So, that’s a change for me” (Grand Harbour Telephonist, T24: 2).

Other examples of changes, described in an episodic way, were changes in policy, driven by distinct, isolated events, as illustrated in the following ‘small story’.

#### **Small Story 5.2 – ‘There were some voices from the top’**

“there was an incident in the summer. They lost their car keys and they had to send [the] whole car to Italy because the guests apparently had no substitute key. And then after that incident then, we were just like...we were kind of told that we have to...well, basically we were told after that event we shouldn’t park nice cars because

then we are taking responsibility for that, right? So there were some voices from the top that they should park their cars by themselves, hold on to their keys ... I'm the one that has to tell the guys that: 'Sorry, I can't park your car because it's too nice.' He's like, 'What?' He's like questioning my professionalism, the professional way of doing things. But I thought the guys would understand why we're doing it, but that was the biggest thing that made me upset" (Royal Bath Porter, T46: 2).

These stories were all examples of simple, isolated events where the change described was easily identified, and was, typically, not placed in a broader narrative.

Reaching a destination, or a point where all change has been completed, was another important feature of this conception of change, identified by the Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager:

"I believe strongly in the company, but I think that that's keeping me energised and knowing that we're not there yet, but I feel closer to being there now and over these past six months as I felt in the eighteen months before that, which is really good. It could be *Shine*, and it could be a whole host of different things which has led to that" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T21: 7).

The source of these alterations in working life was often described by middle managers and employees as driven by senior managers:

"I mean the pace of change within this organization is quite rapid and fast which is driven from the top which is quite different from the organizations that I've worked in before" (De Vere Hotels Human resources Brand Manager, T3: 1).

Some senior managers shared this belief in their influence on shaping change, seeing it as something they could, and perhaps should, be in control of: "one of the joys about being in this company is it's kind of big enough to ... have an impact, but its actually small to get your hands around" (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 4). As well as believing in her own ability to 'get her hands around' changes in De Vere, the HR Director also recognised some of the consequences of approaching change in this centrally-driven way.

In talking about the demand for *Shine* events to be repeated she reflected: “the reason I wouldn't do it [run more *Shine* events] is because it builds a kind of dependency on the central team, you know to come out and do things to the others” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 9). The impact of a well delivered event was highlighted by the Human Resources Brand Manager for De Vere Hotels:

“taking everyone out of the business for four hours has such a huge impact and even the GMs were kind of a bit wowed by the impact that that had” (De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 8).

A danger of this strong connection between the desired change and an isolated event was highlighted by the Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager. For her *Shine* was only associated with an event, and once the event was completed, so was *Shine*:

“It [*Shine*] kind of came to a dead end in a way. Everybody did the initial first course and then that was kind of all that was mentioned about it. We didn't really do it again” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 9).

### **5.3.2 Serial Events**

A natural consequence of a successful change event was the desire for repetition. The De Vere Group Organization Development Manager, who was responsible for the delivery of *Shine*, made reference to the appetite for more workshops that was generated by its impact:

“the question that comes up again and again and again is ‘when is the next central event?’ So consistent feedback that we get is ‘we want another experience like Cranage [the location of the *Shine* launch events]; we want somebody to come in and do things with us” (De Vere Group Organization Development Manager, T6: 8).

Several interviewees echoed this desire for more events, as a means to create more change or maintain changes that had been achieved:

“I think it is perhaps something that should be more ongoing than just a one hour training session. I think that would probably be more useful, although we have the little reminders, I think maybe to go back

and do it again. Do another session every 6 months or something like that” (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T14: 6);

“I think it’s if ever we do it again, every six months and just start again and re- read which I think is probably the best way to do it, is to re-review what we did six months ago and then re-do it again” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T47: 7).

While these comments suggest a desire for change to be ongoing, the method for achieving this is a repetition of the prior event, suggesting change is still conceived of as episodic. This same serial, episodic perspective on change was evident in the Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager’s recollection of change or a lack of change, following the acquisition of De Vere Group by AHG:

“[In] September they announced the company’s been bought out, but then nothing really happened until probably after Christmas. Then we obviously got our new General Manager now and they’ve made lay offs and redundancies” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 2-3).

To maintain momentum towards the conclusion of a change and the return to stability some managers saw the need for further change events. The Group Learning and Development Manager, describes her activities or episodes to maintain the momentum of *Shine*:

“Since then [the launch of *Shine*] ... keeping momentum going was really so [important], doing some of the reviews, the evaluations, the ... group ... discussions, but also ... just keeping it going, those conversations, trying to import into the work I do, and actually ... keep promoting it in that way and help wherever I kinda get requested” (De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager, T9: 4).

Once again, this could be conceived of as a serial, episodic perspective, or, perhaps, the variety of interventions proposed by the Learning and Development Manager has more similarities with a continuous notion of change. The managers and employees of De Vere interviewed, described the focus in episodic change being on the distinct activities or events introduced, often by senior managers or Central Office, to help move their organization from one stable situation to another, different stable situation. There were many stories told about specific change events that fit with this notion of

change. The next section contains stories about *Shine*, the AHG takeover and the impact of changes in personnel.

## **5.4 SIGNIFICANT CHANGE EVENTS**

### **5.4.1 *Shine***

*Shine* was initiated by the senior management of De Vere Group to bring about a change throughout their organization. Some managers and employees described *Shine* as an event and called for further interventions in order to continue its impact, reflecting the serial approach to episodic change discussed earlier in this chapter:

“We had a session back in February. Are we going to have refresher every so often, because people need to be reminded? ... I know, new members are going to be ‘Shined’” (Grand Harbour Payroll Coordinator, T12: 6).

This perspective was underpinned, for others, by an assumption that change was out of the ordinary, and that normality returned after it had been delivered:

“I think initially it did [have an impact]. Yes, everyone was on quite a high when they came out, but I think, give it a moment from then, everything is back to normal” (Royal Bath Human Resources Assistant, T62: 5).

Other managers and employees interviewed saw *Shine* as encompassing a range of other additional activities beyond the initial event, yet they still described change as if were episodic. For example, *Shine* was included in daily communications and employee recognition programmes:

“people have got it in sort of the back of their minds and probably I think it rings a bell with people when they read a daily brief .... There’s also sort of ‘Shining Star of the Week’ they do and of the day, so it probably makes people a little bit more eager to go that extra mile whether it be for a colleague or a customer” (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T14: 5).

It was also possible to interpret the diversity of *Shine* related actions as being more appropriately represented by the notion of continuous change. At



Grand Harbour the main corridor between the employee's break area and the hotel was redecorated following *Shine*:

"When I first joined, there was a lot along the staff corridor. This is *Shine*, this is how we're going to do it, look at how we shine ... People used to fill out comment cards about how they've changed: 'I'm now a really good communicator' or 'I'm now a really good driver', so it must have changed people, or it must have made people think 'this is how I'm going to look to the customers'" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 12);

"we have the *Shine* boards, and this is the main staff entrance and exit, so the minute that you come in, everything is about *Shine*, there's the *Shine* board, he's the Shining star this week, he's the Shining star for the month; and because of that, people take notice and they pay attention. They were proud that their names are up there because it is respected by guests and the General Manager" (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 7).

An even stronger exemplar of continuous change was described by a Management Trainee at Royal Bath, for whom, the initial *Shine* event was sufficient to provide inspiration to make ongoing changes in her own behaviour:

"I think now because we have had the *Shine* meetings and they tell us what we are and who we are and what we can do, I think this inspired people to go out and meet those goals and show people that we can provide the best ... it is definitely giving people ... the 'get up and go' to just get off and do something and make a difference. It has with me" (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 10).

The conception of change did appear have consequences for the perceived effectiveness of *Shine*. This was illustrated by the contrasting fortunes of *Shine* at the Grand Harbour and Royal Bath.

#### **5.4.2 The Contrasting Impact of *Shine* at the Hotels**

Managers and employees described the impact of *Shine* as noticeably different at Grand Harbour and Royal Bath. The De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager recognised that each De Vere Hotel had its own experience of *Shine*:

“we’re kind of all on the journey now from a *Shine* perspective within the eighteen hotels, but very different levels” (De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 2).

The Royal Bath General Manager drew attention to *Shine* not being embedded in his hotel, in spite of having done the events as planned:

“We’d gone though *Shine* very early on. Although we changed the team quite a lot, there was still a core. And we’d done all the *Shine* presentations to all of the staff that were still there. Okay, it wasn’t probably embedded as much as it should’ve been” (Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 7).

The reactions to *Shine* were mixed: “I’d say it’s probably about 50-50; a lot of people think it’s a waste of time and a lot of people think it’s a good idea” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T44: 14). The Royal Bath Food Services Manager offered an explanation for this and contrasted the approach taken with *Verve Service* the ‘replacement’ for *Shine*:

“I don’t think there was enough focus on it [*Shine*] around the hotel ... It wasn’t focused, it was kind of hit and miss. *Verve* was more focused, we got things about, posters all around, problems and decisions with our tag of the day” (Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 12).

The consequences of a lack of focus on *Shine* were elaborated by other De Vere managers:

“‘One team pulling together’ was the only one [of the values] I could remember from *Shine* ... I don’t actually remember a lot from *Shine*. It’s kind of almost gone ... You did once at a *Shine* session and everybody was like really hyped up about *Shine*. And then it died. And then it was just kind of, ‘Yeah. We have these nice little blue cards that we used to swipe in which had this little star on it’ ... Probably no more than two or three months before it certainly start to fade. But it was never talked about a lot. It was never kind of reminded” (Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager, T60: 13-14).

In these stories, there was little to suggest that *Shine* had been more than an isolated episode at Royal Bath. Interviewees from Grand Harbour described the experience of *Shine* in a more positive way. The Grand Harbour Sales Manager, for example, explained her experience on starting work at Grand Harbour after *Shine* had been launched:

“I first came and *Shine* was very apparent in here. It’s a massive thing. It’s talked about by everybody and because I was new I went on to join sessions and then they set up what was called “Lead to *Shine*”. It was a session for HoDs, heads of the departments, to do on a weekly basis things that would help us further develop the system” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 2).

The ‘Lead to *Shine*’ sessions were set up by the Grand Harbour General Manager, on his initiative, not directed by Central Office. His leadership of *Shine* was seen by the team at Grand Harbour as critical, and for the General Manager giving *Shine* direction: “came naturally because I generally believed in those values” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 12-13). The General Manager’s commitment to *Shine* might have been perceived as a critical difference between Grand Harbour and Royal Bath, yet there was evidence of a similar commitment from the General Manager at Royal Bath too:

“I think he [the General Manager] has influenced it. *Shine* was his baby anyway. When we had the meetings, his enthusiasm it was just incredible and he sort of gave us all a big kick” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 10).

The greater impact may have been more related to what the Grand Harbour General Manager was doing with his commitment, and how he perceived change taking place in a more continuous way.

#### **5.4.3 A Continuous Approach to *Shine***

The senior managers at De Vere Group Central Office talked about the need to for *Shine* to be more than a series of activities, to become something that became part of daily life. This reflected more of a continuous change perspective, for example, the Group Marketing Director, emphasised the importance of *Shine* becoming part of ‘business-as-usual’, and, perhaps, represents the desire for embedding of the change that the Royal Bath General Manager had recognised as lacking at his hotel:

“The key issue is to getting it to 'business-as-usual' ...you can’t sustain this kind of thing through constant ... intervention, so you can’t ... run a course every three months. You can’t ... have a *Shine* action plan that lasts anything more than a relatively short period of time. You’ve got to

move rapidly from the launch ... ok, these kinds of events you always want to do some action planning, you know it's a kick start to the full process [and] it's good to have some kind of follow up support and auditing for the next few months, but you've got to get from there rapidly into a place where the processes and the practice and the thinking is just embedded into just how we do business as usual here" (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 8).

The Marketing Director's desire for people to begin to think differently was a theme also referenced by his colleague, the Operations Director for De Vere Hotels:

"I don't know if it's since *Shine*, but people certainly think quite differently than in the beginning. There is no doubt there is a difference. How much has been down to *Shine* I don't know. As a consequence of understanding *Shine*, certainly, but it depends on what you call *Shine*" (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 5-6).

The role of *Shine* in setting the context for a change in approach was discussed by managers and employees from both hotels. It could be thought of as providing an 'official' story, to focus individual sensemaking and activity. For a Personal Assistant at Grand Harbour *Shine* provided exactly this common focus:

"I think that *Shine* gave everybody focus ... it wasn't just done to ground floor staff, it was done to the managers, it was done to everybody. It was a level playing field for everybody" (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 15).

This story gave permission for individuals to act in a different way. For example, the Reservations Supervisor, at Royal Bath, described *Shine* as: "it's kind of bit of an excuse ... it's kind of an excuse to do things to make people happy" (Zoe, Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 5). The impact of the *Shine* story was important "because I think people need a hook to hold on to. I think we're all running around doing our own jobs that sometimes we need something to lift us out of the woodwork" (De Vere Hotels Marketing Brand Manager, T7: 4). The Grand Harbour Sales Manager also saw *Shine* as also giving employees the permission to act in a particular way:

“I believe [the change in behaviour] has an awful lot to do with *Shine* because they’ll all walk around with stars. That’s what does it because they’ve got that behind them; they’ve been on this session and they’ve been told that they’re allowed to do these things” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 6).

It also enabled managers to hold their teams to account for behaving in a different way: “You were all at *Shine*, you all got the message. Right, well let’s see it” (Grand Harbour Room Service Manager, T15: 6). At Grand Harbour managers and employees attending the *Shine* events were given small lapel badges shaped as stars. As their Sales Manager described, these badges appeared in the view of interviewees to carry an important symbolic value. She continued to describe the role of the badges:

“you’ve got this star and it meant you were a shining star ... you could tell it was thought very highly of ... because people wore their stars with pride” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 5).

The value of the star badges was reinforced by other interviewees: “I think, people will be reluctant to give up their little badges” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 18). The Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, saw the impact of *Shine* as being much broader than the events and activities, for her the change was the way in which people talked to each other:

“in terms of impact here, it actually started to embed itself into the business and not because we’ve got a corridor with lots of shining stars on it, but the way we treated our people and the way we talk to each other - managers talk to each other - and also the level of performance that we would expect and we wouldn’t be afraid to manage” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 5).

These descriptions of *Shine* are more accurately represented by the notion of continuous change, in spite of the launch of the change programme being strongly associated with a single event.

#### **5.4.4 The End of *Shine*?**

Following the takeover of De Vere Group by AHG, *Shine* was ‘discontinued’ as an initiative and a new programme, *Verve Service*, introduced. The way in

which this was received by my interviewees reflected on their perceptions of the nature of change. For some managers and employees, interpreting change as continuous the introduction of *Verve* was no more than a name change. This perspective was particularly prevalent amongst the Grand Harbour interviewees:

“the big thing is keeping everybody motivated, because with these changes people do get very easily de-motivated. So, what we’re trying to do is not say that this is the new *Shine*. It’s not a different process, it’s not a different culture, it is the same, but it’s been renamed” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 7).

However, for some at Grand Harbour the name was important, as the Housekeeping Supervisor reflected:

“I think people are confused with the word Verve. They don’t quite understand what Verve means. And, I don’t, really. Although I know it’s a word, but whereas people could recognise Shining, you couldn’t take Verve. It’s just another name, isn’t it? Is it because it’s a different company?” (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T32: 12).

At Royal Bath the story behind the name was told by the Group Reservations Manager:

“It’s very similar [to *Shine*]. Obviously, they always are ... They now call it Verve ... but actually they didn’t want to call it Verve, but they bought the brand Verve so, therefore, they have to use it somewhere” (Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager, T60: 11).

It was not only the word Verve that caused concern.

### **Small Story 5.3 – ‘Why we’re going to have a ‘V’**

“We don’t understand why we’re going to have a ‘V’, and we would rather have a star because it’s a Five Star Hotel. People are going to be questioning, ‘What’s the ‘V’ for?’ All right, you can say to them, ‘it’s about communicating and doing the best we can for our guests’, but we prefer the star. But I don’t know whether they would listen to us on that. I don’t know. Because you can see it, like McDonald’s they have a star, you can think, ‘Oh, yeah, that’s one’. They’ve got three stars, that’s quite good, but with a lot of ‘V’ we’re all like “Why?” So, we’re not looking forward to wearing that, really” (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T32: 12 ).

For the Royal Bath Food Controller, *Verve* had some advantages over *Shine*, though neither in his view had made a lasting difference:

“I just think it became across a bit more simpler and straightforward as well which is a good thing about it. But once again, I don’t think it massively affected anyone” (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 4).

This view of the impact of both *Shine* and *Verve* at Royal Bath was echoed by the Front of House Manager, for whom they were both episodes which came, and then went:

“we had our own internal things, so *Shine* came in, running property wide, which was driving things forward and helping people with an understanding, and then *Verve* came in to supersede that and to take it another step further with it, and then just fell away. There is now currently nothing like that running” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T65: 10-11).

The introduction of *Verve* was only one thing that altered following the takeover by AHG. The next section explores other changes triggered by this takeover, and how managers and employees made sense of these within the frameworks of episodic and continuous change.

#### **5.4.5 The AHG Takeover**

The takeover of De Vere Group by AHG was an unexpected event during my fieldwork, and generated a lot of discussion with my interviewees. Some managers were exposed to the AHG Directors in September 2006 immediately after the completion of the deal and took away a lasting first impression: “we got called into a meeting at Bolton when it was all taken over. From that very minute, it came across as quite aggressive – a quite aggressive company” (Grand Harbour Former General Manager, T53: 3). For others, expectations were high, even without any direct contact, as the Room Service Manager at Grand Harbour summarised: “New company name. New broom sweeps clean” (Grand Harbour Room Service Manager, T27: 2). The anticipation was that changes were going to follow quickly, though some interviewees experienced the months following the takeover as a stable time:

“Oh, everyone seems to be quite excited about it, obviously, with the new company taking over. Everyone’s really excited, and things like that, and we thought that the major changes... we, obviously, see that there was going to be some redundancies, and we knew what was going to happen, and we thought it was going to happen there and then, and it didn’t happen until October, November” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 2).

Others described the time immediately after the takeover as characterised by poor communication:

“communication has been really quite poor with the transition which is a shame because I think we’ve gone from knowing everything and everybody knowing everything about what’s going on and really open culture as far as communication is concerned” (De Vere Group Learning and Development Partner, T1: 3).

For some interviewees this stable period, and the lack of communication from the ‘new’ Central Office, was a source of heightened anticipation of what might be to come.

#### **Small Story 5.4 – ‘All of a sudden it went quiet’**

“Well, it happened quite quickly, didn’t it? I’m trying to think about it. September when they took over, wasn’t it? I think it upset a lot of people because of the head office got impacted quite quickly and a lot of people lost their jobs very quickly; a lot of people that work very closely with us, and then, obviously, this new company came in, saying that they were going to move very quickly on things; and signage was going to get changed; that [the General Manager] is going to get changed; and it was all going to happen so, so fast. All of these people lost their jobs at head office and then all of a sudden it went quiet and we didn’t hear anything ... So, it wasn’t moving as fast as they said that it was going to move. So then, you get slightly a bit despondent about it and you think, ‘Well, do they really know what they’re doing? I don’t think they do’. And I think, the communication has really broken down quite considerably ... because we went from a company, where we had masses of communication to, all of the sudden, we don’t get memos from head office or anything now. We just don’t get anything. We used to get a big memo come every Thursday. It was about this big. And then, we used to get emails coming through all the time. We get nothing. We just get a phone call, now and again, and then, a memo that comes from [an AHG



Director], in his headed black paper, which always worries us. Whenever we get one of those, 'Oh my gosh, what's this?' and, yeah, they have a bizarre way of communicating, I think, but we've got used to that now. The transition period, it's taken us about four months, five months, I think, to understand, and also believing really that what they're doing is the right thing because all of the sudden it's very rash. All of these people were gone, from head office, and all these decisions, and you got to cut your payroll by £27,000. It's all big decisions quickly, but we never saw anybody" (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 19-20).

In contrast to *Shine*, where the changes being introduced were explained and positioned in an 'official' story, there was an apparent void of communication in this period after the takeover. As described in the previous 'small story', this was a source of confusion and anxiety. For the Assistant Food Services Manager at Royal Bath there had still been little impact of the takeover when I interviewed her in March 2007, though there was still anticipation of change to come:

"there's the change with the new ownership and everything, that hasn't affected us as of yet. But in two weeks, the new Food and Beverage Director for the company starts, so that's probably going to have an effect" (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 2).

The similarities, rather than the differences, between the times before and after the takeover were a focus for some interviewees, emphasising stability rather than change. The Royal Bath Operations Manager described, in March 2007, the AHG approach to the planned refurbishment of the hotel:

"Too many people get involved, but that's no different to where it was on the De Vere, to be honest, so nothing gets done quickly and, to be fair, they've only had the company since October. So, I do believe what they're doing is definitely happening, there's just some frustration over it" (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T57: 2).

And for some employees there was simply no identifiable change due to AHG:

"For me personally, it hasn't been a massive change in that my job hasn't been affected massively by AHG taking over. Things around me have obviously changed, but me personally, not so much. The biggest change for me was probably my Executive Chef leaving, which was all

at the same time, [but] wasn't directly connected to this AHG takeover" (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 2).

While employees referred to the alteration to their personal working lives as small following the AHG takeover, there were different expectations about change under AHG ownership. These expectations were described by my interviewees as having been influenced by interpretations of the nature of private ownership by AHG. There was a different narrative used to make sense of possible change: "people were worried because they thought this [AHG] was a finance company and that all they're interested in is money" (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T32: 10), a fear that was reaffirmed, by the same employee, at a subsequent interview: "we have been taken over by finance company which has whittled everything down" (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T40: 2). This was a story that appeared to have been created by employees to fill the gap left by any formal communications to the contrary. The Food Controller at Royal Bath also focused on this financial incentive for AHG Directors:

"It's the Board of Director's personal finances and extra profit means extra profits for them, whereas the PLC you are going to be trying to please shareholders. I'm sure there are different agendas going on now" (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 10-11).

The requirement to pay back the money borrowed to finance the acquisition was another theme:

"they owe money to the bank, so they got to pay the bank, so the quickest way to get their money back is get rid of staff that is not needed, and it's people you work with and it's their lives" (Grand Harbour Food and Beverage Controller, T23: 5).

This focus on private ownership was elaborated further by the Grand Harbour Revenue Manager:

"They own it. It is their money. It is completely different to a PLC because actually the money that you are using and you spend it is actually theirs. It is out of their pocket. Obviously, it was not with the PLC. It is completely different. It is more passionate for them and I think you see that in the changes that are made, they are passionate changes" (Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, T38: 10).

Managers and employees described some of the decisions made by AHG as difficult to understand, perhaps due to the 'passionate changes' described by Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, as well as missing 'official' story. For one Human Resources Assistant the AHG approach to change lacked 'structure':

"I just know that they're really, really keen on change and they've definitely put a lot of change in, but there's no structure, so to speak. They make managers redundant and things ... but you can't really see why they're doing it" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 9).

The Grand Harbour General Manager described the personal impact of this approach, a further increase in anxiety:

"some of my colleagues left the building with no notice and it was not down to performance, it was down to the belief that they were not the right people to make this go forward, and [that] made me very uncertain and have a lack of confidence" (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 5).

The takeover by AHG was viewed as a change event by De Vere Group managers and employees. However, many of the descriptions of subsequent changes were framed more as continuous change than episodic. Interviewees described redundancies and the dismissal of General Managers, but the focus was on alterations to the context or plotlines that allowed the managers to make sense of their experiences, as with the attribution of Director's motives. The lack of a story provided by AHG did not prevent common plots being developed by managers and employees. Some interviewees described more abstract differences in the organization under the ownership of AHG:

"We've taken away autonomy from the GMs and that's very important to people like [our General Manager], that's why he joined ... and they aren't communicating properly to them so they don't really know what's happening. When they do communicate, it seems to lack clarity. It's almost to say they've got together and arranged it over a couple of glasses of wine the night before" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34).

The consequence for some interviewees was an apparent ambivalence towards AHG, describing some positive and some negative differences:

“it’s their money. They’ll do whatever they want with it. These are people who decide people’s futures and they don’t care whom they stomp on ... that’s what I don’t like about it. It’s fantastic that they’re going to spend all this money [on refurbishment], if they do, it’s fantastic” (Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 3-4).

These two significant change events, AHG takeover and *Shine*, were not the only organizational changes taking place at the time of my fieldwork. There were many other operational and personnel changes occurring simultaneously and how these were made sense of by managers and employees is the focus of the next section.

#### **5.4.6 Personnel Changes**

The most frequent response to my opening interview question - ‘What sort of changes have you seen in your time here?’ - was to describe changes in personnel. It was clear from the managers and employees that I interviewed they believed that someone moving into or out of the business brought change. The ‘cause and effect’ was also described, in reverse, as change being a driver of people moving. So on the one hand, the arrival of a new Chief Executive in 2003 was frequently referenced as the starting point for changes underway at De Vere:

“this business, with [the Chief Executive’s] arrival, went through a really big emotional ... transition to be honest. I think it had been run fairly comfortably, in the sense it had been run quite within itself. It was a successful business, it was very stable, but it wasn’t particularly ambitious” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 2).

As the Royal Bath Food Controller succinctly put it: “if your Managing Director changes and that’s automatically a sign that there’s going to be changes” (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 5). On the other hand, *Shine* and the different management behaviour that was associated with it, were seen by De Vere Group senior managers as causing people to choose to leave the organization:

“we lost a lot of people as a direct result of *Shine*: from those on the day saying, ‘I don’t want to be a part of this organization because I don’t live to those values’; ... to people who were being told two or three days later ‘You are not living the values we discussed, therefore, you have to go’; to people being challenged on the values and saying that ‘I don’t want to be a part of this’, all the way through the organization” (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 2).

Individuals choosing to leave following a change in the leadership were described at Grand Harbour:

“the structure was not set up to make it effective really, to be honest with you, because there was too many managers, ‘too many Chiefs and not enough Indians’ and so, obviously, we went into this idea that we were going to restructure. These were the positions we were going to have available and they [the existing managers] were allowed to apply for their positions ... there was a possibility we were only going to lose one or two and it was just going to rejiggle around the positions that we already had, but we had a bit of an avalanche effect and everyone just went ... At the time it was a bad thing because we were left with hardly anybody, but [now] I don’t think it was a bad thing” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 8).

For a number of employees, the loss of a manager was the only interruption to the stability of the organization: “I don’t think there’s any major changes apart from all the people ... the manager leaving and getting a new manager” (Grand Harbour Reservations Supervisor, T16: 1), or at least a managerial change was described as a personally significant event:

“He was with us for about four or five months when he decided he was going to leave to go off and sort of go traveling and that was quite a shock because it was unexpected and quite sad in a way because he had helped quite a lot and sort of been helpful to myself. He had brought in a lot of change when he started, but then for him to leave suddenly it was quite unexpected and in that short space of time, just after he said he was going to leave, we had our team leader at the time, she said she was going to leave as well” (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T13: 3).

These were also personally significant events for the individuals leaving, especially for those who were asked to leave. The Royal Bath General Manager was fired by the AHG Directors in January 2007. I interviewed him in March 2007.

### Vignette 5.1 – Why?

I hadn't expected that my PhD fieldwork would take me to Croydon, South London. It was also a surprise to find a 'country house' hotel with golf course in such a suburban location, but this business was the new charge of the former General Manager of the Royal Bath, unceremoniously dumped by AHG three months before. He met me in the spacious reception area and broad smile communicated his relief to be working again so soon after leaving De Vere. He took me through a labyrinth of 'back of house' corridors, tight, dark and in desperately in need of a coat of paint. His office was an unprepossessing room, located at the back of the hotel, accompanied by a clash and clatter soundtrack courtesy of the large rubbish bins outside the frosted and reinforced high level windows. We sat down. The General Manager called his secretary and ordered us two teas. Before I could begin the interview, the story of his departure from De Vere began:

"I got a phone call on the Friday before the Monday, and it was my wife's birthday. And to say, would I go to a meeting in Daresbury for 11 o'clock on the Monday, which was all very inconvenient because to get to Daresbury by 11 o'clock is a chore ... and I was on my way home because we were going out that evening, so it was like, 'What's it all about?' and deep down I knew what it was all about, but I just wanted verification because of the whole weekend of uncertainty and I rang [an AHG Director] and [the AHG HR Director] to ask for clarification on what the meeting was all about and they never bothered to ring me back. Which would have been difficult for them ... but I thought it was just really quite unprofessional about the whole thing. It wasn't even them that rang. It was his secretary. And I just thought it spoke volumes about the whole thing, if he'd just rang up and said 'Look, we need to discuss your future and everything.' I'd have been fine with that, but to leave you hanging on the whole weekend, I just thought it was unprofessional. You know, if they're going to do it, then do it on the Monday and call me there for the Tuesday ... and not to bother even ringing me back. Yes, it would have been a difficult conversation for him, but that's what he's bloody paid for to have these difficult conversations. And I'm when I went in on Monday I made it easy for them because I knew by then. I just knew. As soon as he said, 'You know we are going to invest money and we need a change of leadership.' I knew it then that it wasn't me ... But the one thing that was difficult and

still is difficult, and my wife said, 'Why?' And that is it. Why? Because my figures were better than a lot of other people's. And I still, to this day, don't know why. At that time I should have said 'why?' But at that time, you're not really quite together about the whole thing so I tended to... I suppose to a certain degree it's a relief. I mean it's two day's worry and when somebody says it, it's a relief" (Former Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 7).

Not understanding why he had been fired was an issue the former General Manager of Royal Bath returned to again, as he tried to find a reason:

"I personally believe that it was because I didn't make a big enough impression to some of the directors when they came around. I think I was under the misrepresentation that performance counts. To be honest with you, I'm not 100% sure it goes with them, if the truth be known. But don't ask me what I would have to do to have made an impression because I don't know. But I think that deep down maybe a bit of naivety on my part" (Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 7).

At the end of the interview, we weaved our way back through the maze and appeared out into the bright sunshine. I couldn't help feeling that he was never going to get a clear answer to his question, and that may be there wasn't even one to be found.

Several interviewees reflected on the typically high rate of employee turnover in the hospitality sector, making changes in personnel a common occurrence:

"a lot of it is people in hotels only stay for certain durations of time and the people that have been going were probably coming up to their shelf life in hotels anyway. You do usually maximum two years" (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 3).

This turnover was attributed to the volatility of operational work by a Sales Coordinator at Grand Harbour:

"staff turnover will always be a lot higher because things within the hotel change constantly and sometimes we're busy and sometimes we're not, and different types of people come in through the doors every day and perhaps some people don't like the change" (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T13: 14).

This rationale suggested that the amount and nature of change in hotels was behind a high employee turnover. The Guest Services Manager at Grand Harbour argued the 'cause and effect' from the opposite direction, with new employees being the initiators of change:

"change with personnel is very healthy as well because we all get stuck in a rut and get blinkered and we can't see beyond what we see, we can't see around us, and you need somebody to come along and open your eyes and say actually have you seen that, no, and then you think actually I saw that when I first came here but you put it to the back of your head because you accept things, you accept poor performance, you accept poor behaviour because it's easier to accept it than to do something about it" (Grand Harbour Guest Services Manager, T22: 19).

Other interviewees took a less positive view of personnel changes:

"your staff are changing and changing, so now we've got a team that pretty much all trained up. Now they're all starting to leave, so now we're getting ... short-staffed" (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 9).

Whatever the point of view on the benefits and costs of personnel changes, the frequency and impact, described by the managers and employees interviewed, created a picture of a volatile environment in De Vere Group. It was into this dynamic, rather than stable, organization that initiatives such as *Shine* were introduced. This more continuous perspective on change is explored in the next section.

## **5.5 CONTINUOUS CHANGE**

### **5.5.1 'Natural' Change**

As an alternative conception to episodic change, continuous change was referred to by De Vere managers and employees: "I think change always happens continuously" (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 10). Another employee described: "ever since the moment the announcement came it, it's just been continuous change" (De Vere Group Learning and Development Partner, T1: 7). For some it was as simple as "no day is ever the same" (Grand Harbour Reception Supervisor, T28: 5). The Royal Bath General Manager used the example of his approach to *Shine's* replacement, *Verve*



*Service*, to stress the importance of change being something normal: “I try and make it part of everyday life to the staff, so in effect it’s natural” (Royal Bath General Manager, T55: 3). This sense of change being ‘natural’ was picked up by the Learning and Development Manager from Central Office:

“for me it’s been a natural progression and a natural evolution of the company and the organization to see it happen, but it seems like everyday there is kind of a new wave of change coming through, both from an operational perspective, but also from behavioral perspective” (De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager, T9: 1).

Noticing the impact of change over a longer time period and conceiving of it as something gradual was recognised by the Royal Bath Maintenance Manager:

“it has been a gradual change from the changes in the management and staff changes that sort of thing, you know, but nothing really stands out I would say” (Royal Bath Maintenance Manager, T49: 13).

This slower pace of change was also the focus for the Group Marketing Director. In contrast to some interviewees who attributed significant impact to the *Shine* cascade workshops, the Marketing Director saw this as a somewhat naive point of view:

“the Insights [Employee Satisfaction Survey] result suggest that it’s not a seismic shift, it’s a gradual shift in the right direction. But you know I think you need to be ... frankly a little bit naive to think that you can put your people through a four hour programme and expect things to be different the next day. I think things are still the same ... but, you know, it gives context to what we’re trying to achieve” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 13).

The role of *Shine* in providing a point of focus, or an ‘official story’, will be returned to later in this chapter, and in the discussion chapter. Behind this gradual change was the idea of constant small alterations in what people said and did: “Perhaps, change happens everyday – just go with the flow and see if it works” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T57: 15). For a Restaurant Supervisor at Grand Harbour, these ‘little steps’ would have a big impact over a longer time period:

“we’ve got lots of lots of good ideas, but now we have to face the reality ... but with little steps we’re getting small bits and pieces and

hopefully by the end of the year the restaurant will be, you know, one of the best restaurants in the Southampton” (Grand Harbour Restaurant Supervisor, T19: 6).

While continuous change was described by some as ‘natural’, it was also attributed greater complexity by managers and employees.

### **5.5.2 Complication and Complexity**

The experience of attempting to influence what was happening in De Vere was described as being fragmented and circular, as illustrated in the following ‘small story’.

#### **Small Story 5.5 – ‘You keep going round and round again’**

“I know that it’s not a logical, sequential process for change to happen, but what seems to happen at De Vere is you get a kind of brief and ‘this is where we want to go, this is what we want it to be like’. You get so far and you check it out; you get so far and you check it out again and then you get to that sixty, seventy percent mark. [Then] somebody goes back to the beginning and completely questions the fundamental underlying principles and that’s how change happens in De Vere. It’s not just a bit of a wavy line. It’s a complete circle. You keep going round and round again and eventually you pop out at the end and that’s how it happens. It’s very... I was going to say very uncontrolled but... emergent, evolving... not purposefully planned sometimes. So there’s a vision in somebody’s head, but when you drill down to the detail of that, it’s kind of not even there, because they don’t think it’s important to have it at the beginning or they can’t articulate it to you very clearly, so it’s a struggle to really drive out any kind of view on the end game and what fundamentally does that look like, ‘where are we headed?’ and it’s very challenging to take the business there as a whole. So it’s fragmented, it’s a very, kind of, go in circles to get there ... you can enjoy the ride if you get in the right mentality, but if you’re the poor soul who’s having to manage it all through, it’s very, very frustrating” (De Vere Group Organization Development Manager, T6: 20)

There were some clear contrasts in the way continuous change was described, compared to episodic change. It was a more complicated process for

managers and employees to articulate. Firstly, there was more of an emphasis on change coming from the 'bottom' of the organization and rising 'up', rather than being determined by senior managers and pushed 'down':

"I suppose as an organization we are quite good at bubbling stuff up in local areas, what we don't kind of get is some sort of attraction midway through the organization where somebody grabs this business, something good here because they are doing it, they are doing it... let me kind of pull it together and work out what it is" (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T5: 5-6).

The role of managers was described as providing daily reinforcement, in support of the gradual shifts of continuous change:

"we talk about the daily *Shine*, give examples of *Shine*, just so it's constantly living, it's constantly been about business ... So from one day to the next, it's always, always the same message. Never let go. You know don't drop the ball" (Grand Harbour Operations Manager, T20: 6-7)

Secondly, the idea of De Vere Group and individual managers being on a journey, rather than a focus on a destination, was a contrast identified:

"I think they've really taken the opportunity of starting the kind of journey through their hotel with these new values and everything ... certainly speaking to some of the GMs that are coming new at that time, they just found it so invaluable that they were able to start this journey and really that was the way in which it started their career with De Vere" (De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 4).

The never ending nature of the journey was voiced by the Group Human Resources Director:

"the whole alignment piece and as you're trying to bring everything in tune with the values, it's massive and you know its difficult to see where it ends, but it doesn't actually, but it just keeps going on" (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 6).

For the General Manager at Grand Harbour there was a need to operate without the 'complete picture' due to the frequency of changes:

"I think we won't see the real picture of the company completely because there are too many changes, and every week, it happens, the change" (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 2).

Operating in this confusion, without ‘the whole picture’, or a unifying single narrative, was reported by several managers. Furthermore, articulating continuous change was more difficult, and was seen as something different from a series of episodes. This may have been a linguistic problem, as Chia (1999: 215) asserts: “it is only when portions of reality are assumed to be fixable in space-time, and are relatively unchanging, that they can adequately be represented by words and concepts”. The Group Human Resources Director used an analogy to describe the change *Shine* was setting out to achieve that captured the nature of this conception of change:

“[change is] a bit like if you are trying to, you know, get into losing weight, you know you lose weight by actually eating healthily every single day and it becomes then the norm” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 8).

The Revenue Manager at Grand Harbour caught the dynamic nature of change with another analogy:

“it is probably a bit [of a] roller coaster to be fair ... because one minute you could feel a little bit down the next minute you sort of up in the sky and all day you are happy, so a bit of roller coaster is the best way to describe it I guess” (Louise, Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, T38: 16).

The desire for *Shine* to be more than an event was summarised clearly by the De Vere Group Chief Executive:

“is it [*Shine*] continuing to make a difference or was it flavour of the month? I mean one of the things I was very worried about was this sense that I think people had of ‘right what’s next?’ It’s like nothing. You know. We just launched the way we want you to go about things in the future. There’s no kind of second launch, I mean you can only launch it once. This is a long term sustainable thing that we want to bring about. But there was this sort of expectation of ‘right what’s next?’” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 7).

However, his statement lacks a description of what change should be like if it is not another event. From the point of view of the De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, the nature of the change that *Shine* was attempting was fundamental enough to be independent of the ownership of the organization, and was about an approach to working with people:

“they’re still driving through *Shine* because at the end of the day, I think the view is that no matter who is kind of looking after the company, who owns the company etc, there will be a way that we deal with people and the way that we treat our people and values that we live as an organization and it doesn’t matter whose name is above the door” (De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 7).

For others the continuous impact of *Shine* was more associated with a feeling: “The buzz is still happening. So, it is not like we have had the *Shine* thing and it sort of died. It is sort of keep going and going and going” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 13).

### 5.5.3 Combinations of Changes

One of the consequences of an episodic focus on change was the tendency of organization members to see events occurring in isolation of each other. Managers and employees taking the continuous change perspective were more able to recognise the overlapping, or combined, nature of changes taking place in De Vere. Interviewees were more cautious in attributing causes to particular effects that they observed:

“since *Shine* things have been a lot more straightforward, things have been a lot more honest, things have been a lot more open. Now that could just coincide with the fact that [our new General Manager] has come on board and that’s his style anyway” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T21: 2).

The impact of the Grand Harbour General Manager’s style in combination with *Shine* was commented on by a number of interviewees:

“They [*Shine* and a new General Manager] are happening together and I think you can't put one more important than the other. I think they are equally important and they worked really well” (Grand Harbour Payroll Coordinator, T12: 9);

“I think it’s been 50/50. I think it’s been 50% *Shine* and 50% [new General Manager] ... I think what *Shine* has done is backed up [the General Manager’s] values and backed up what his thoughts are and what his style of management” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 7).

A similar combination of influences was also attributed to the Chief Executive and *Shine*:

“Internally, people are starting to see a shift, but I do believe that started before ‘*Shine*’. I think it’s been a “CEO” shift rather than a “*Shine*” shift. I think “*Shine*” has helped and maybe dressed up that message and made it more comfortable and palatable, but I think that change was coming” (De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager, T9: 10).

The benefits of choosing a single point of focus were highlighted by the Front of House Manager at Royal Bath. He also articulated the reality for him of needing to address multiple issues simultaneously:

“Yeah, I think [he] has brought a lot of good into the hotel. And he came in and as a new General Manager his focus was on revenue, which is great. It has moved from GSS [Guest Satisfaction Survey] to revenue which is great. And then from there it moved to staff with the *Shine* coming in, which once again is great. And then once again it’s got another one, back to our GSS Survey. So yeah, maybe it’s me that I’m trying to do all of those things at once, where I want them to keep everything [in] a happy balance and concentrate on all of them at the same time” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T45: 10).

While articulating continuous change may present a greater challenge than episodic change, where specific events can be easily identified, interviewees did tell stories that exemplified continuous change. Shifts in the use of language and in working relationships are described in the next section.

## **5.6 EXAMPLES OF CHANGE AS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS**

### **5.6.1 Integration of the *Shine* Terminology**

Having focused on two major triggers for change in De Vere Group and the impact of new personnel, these next sections consider the how managers and employees made sense of the consequences of these. The use of the words ‘trigger’ and ‘consequences’ best suits an episodic perspective on change. Many of these alterations in working life, however, were described by my interviewees as continuous shifts in the way in which people in the organization conducted themselves. The interviewees identified changes in the language used by managers and employees during the period of my

fieldwork. The De Vere Hotels Operations Director highlighted an increased clarity, in a number of significant areas, brought to the organization, following *Shine*:

“a common language; a common focus on what's important; a clarity around responsibility throughout the organization of who does what; a clarity around the processes that have to be adopted and those that don't; that's progress I think, yeah, that's what changed” (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 2).

The De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager, was more concerned to know when that common language had been reached: “what are the lines in the sand that says by this point we will have integrated it [*Shine*] into our language” (De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager, T9: 16). The specific terminology offered by *Shine* was seen by some managers and employees as helpful:

“I think a lot of people still use it within their departments and things just because it's kind of very catchy... “You're a shining star,” that sounds really good” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 7).

The De Vere Group Marketing Director made the link between *Shine* and culture, and the importance of the adoption of the *Shine* terminology into people's vocabulary:

“No one even thinks about it ... in a sense *Shine* is a kind of shorthand for the culture we want to create and in that sense it is great if it can live on in people's vocabulary” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 9).

One of the examples of the ‘language of *Shine*’ was the statement of values and these were seen as having infiltrated the everyday discussions in De Vere:

“The values are certainly used a lot in terms of talk, particularly ‘customer focus’ and ‘straightforward and with respect’. They are certainly used a lot in the day-to-day language” (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 9-10).

### **5.6.2 Increased Openness and Engagement**

As well as changes in vocabulary, interviewees described employees becoming more vocal in sharing their opinions:

“A lot of people are getting more involved in things as well. It used to be known as the suits who do all the talking, but now people has started to come forward and share their opinions, which is good, which is what the company needs” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 3);

“if I look at that meeting compared to a meeting, perhaps going back a year, even when [the General Manager] first started with the management that we had then, everyone’s questions were much more constructive” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 8).

This increased openness and willingness to engage in debate was seen as a major development by De Vere Group Senior Managers, as it underpinned their approach to improving customer service. One Management Trainee described her feeling of involvement:

“we are constantly informed of what is going on and we have our chance to say anything that we do not agree with or anything we want changed, which is good because we are influencing - we are helping run this place” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 9).

The Senior Management view on how De Vere was changing was summed up by the Group Marketing Director:

“I think it is becoming more willing to express its feelings as an organization. It is being more willing to surface disagreements, surface the debate, it is certainly becoming more customer focused. Possibly without even realising it, but I think it is” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 13).

For the Human Resources Manager at Grand Harbour managers being ‘willing to surface disagreements’ was a critical to the management of individual employee performance:

“To me, it’s greatly about performance management, and that was what was potentially lacking under the old GM ... and being very straightforward with these people” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 6).

More direct feedback to managers and employees was one of the policies introduced by senior managers as part of *Shine*, through the corporate value, ‘straightforward, with respect’, or simply “we are very honest with each other” (Grand Harbour Operations Manager, T33: 5). As well as impacting individual



performance management, as described by the Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, it was a behaviour change that led to an increase in employee turnover.

#### **Small Story 5.6 – ‘That feedback was taken very hard’**

“Last year ... I had challenges with [one of the Heads of Department] and they were small things. They were about recruiting people ... not actually telling us that they had been recruited so then they didn’t get paid, they haven’t got a uniform, those sorts of things. I raised that as a concern within the senior team and I get told to stop picking on him ...

[The new General Manager] came in, and *Shine* came in, and [the new Operations Manager] came in, ... and from [the Head of Department] being very good at what he did and running fabulous events, the bit that I saw started to be seen by other people ... and feedback was given to [the Head of Department] from [the General Manager], from [the Operations Manager], and from me, and that feedback was taken very, very hard. He took it very, very personally ... threw a bit of mud about to be honest and at one point said ‘it’s very hard for me from being consistently praised to actually being now criticised quite a lot’. Under [the previous General Manager] he was praised, he was now being given feedback ... It has now resulted, actually, in [the Head of Department] resigning. It would have been really good, because he’s really good at some elements, that he had embraced that feedback, recognised it, and gone in a more positive direction, but he didn’t so we’ve got a result, I guess, either way.

It’s stories like that; that happened with the Bars Manager; that happened with the Chef; that happened with the Restaurant Manager. It makes it sound as if we’re bullying them out and that’s not it at all. It is this is how we’re working here now ‘this is the feedback we’re going to give you, you give us feedback as well, but if you don’t like it’ – it has never been said – ‘but if you don’t like it then this isn’t the place you should be working’” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T21: 10-11).

*Shine* had a clear customer service objective of ‘special people creating special experiences. This relationship between engaged employees and satisfied customers was a subject at several interviews:

“once we have the *Shine* meetings, everyone was just buzzing and it is just not going to effect the staff, guests, members, regulars here, so just everyone is happy, really a lot happier” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 13).

This was reinforced by the Royal Bath General Manager:

“I think the staff were generally more friendly. They were more outgoing. They were not afraid to engage customers before customers engaged them” (Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 10).

A key difference influencing employee behaviour: “was confidence to go the extra mile” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 5). This confidence also had an impact on working relationships within the hotels, and this is described in the next section.

#### **5.6.4 The Contrasting Alterations in Working Relationships**

Managers and employees described changes in their working relationships during the period of my fieldwork. Attending the *Shine* launch events was seen as a catalyst for General Managers and their Executive Teams to operate in a different way:

“it got managers and their teams working together and talking to each other and talking about each other’s strengths and weaknesses in an open way which previously I don’t think they really had the opportunity to do” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 9).

This opportunity to talk to each other openly at the *Shine* launch event brought changes back in the workplace: “I have seen them with their people; it’s changed them and it’s changed the relationships in their hotels without a doubt” (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 7).

In the hotels there was a noticeable difference in the comments made by my interviewees with regard to working relationships. At Royal Bath there were

few comments on any noticeable alterations in the way people were seen to be operating together. A Management Trainee at Royal Bath described a positive change in behaviour as she saw it. However, the improvement was delivered by individuals, not by better working relationships:

“Everyone is doing things individually. It is not like it is a group effort. Everyone is making change everywhere which is making a difference in the hotel which is always a good thing because then no one is following a sheep, then everyone has got their own ideas and opinions” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 16).

The story at Grand Harbour was described, by the managers and the employees working there, in a consistently different way from Royal Bath. Grand Harbour interviewees made reference to changes in working relationships at each of my three visits. In May 2006, after the new General Manager had been in position for six months and the *Shine* cascade events had just been run, the General Manager’s Personal Assistant had noticed that:

“everyone speaks to each other now, they never used to speak to each other. You’d walk down the corridor and no one would say hello anybody or anything” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 6).

Even when individuals perceived little change, a difference in relationships was noted:

“I’ve not changed personally. I have noticed that a couple of my team members have got a bit more friendlier with other people. But that’s about it, to be honest with you” (Grand Harbour Reservations Supervisor, T16: 2).

By March 2007, there was a strong team ethos described by managers and employees interviewed at Grand Harbour. This included employees moving across departments to support their colleagues:

“We all helped more. We worked around the building and we helped more. If anybody else was in difficulties then we offered our services and made sure that everybody was okay and nobody was struggling and if they were, we tried to help in anyway we could” (Grand Harbour Room Service Manager, T27: 12).

For a supervisor from housekeeping, it had become acceptable to offer advice outside her own area:

“Now, I can go to any of the departments downstairs. Now, if I feel the cupboards are messy, or if I feel that health and safety issue, I can just say that that needs to be done” (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T32: 5).

As well as working together more, the Sales Manager at Grand Harbour had noticed a change in the working environment: “I’ve never been to a hotel where all of the maids, wherever you walk, will say ‘Good morning’ or ‘Good afternoon’ [or] ‘Hello, how are you?’” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 6). This change in behaviour was more striking to those managers and employees who had worked at Grand Harbour for some time, as previous General Managers had not encouraged working across departments:

“I think it [*Shine*] was quite a turning point for the hotel actually, to be honest with you, because ... the departments were very much kept separately [previously] and it brought everyone together” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 11).

For some interviewees the involvement of everyone in *Shine* made an important statement:

“With *Shine*, it did bring everybody together because it was one thing that was everybody was aiming towards. It wasn’t like a different level for managers, different level for team leaders ... everybody was there. It was a mixture of people and they were all there to achieve the same thing” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 9-10).

A similar perspective on working relationships was still being expressed in November 2007:

“it has become a more friendly place and it has become less cliquy. Because I think it very much was a very clique place, whereas now we are very much are one team” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T36: 9).

There had been a significant change at Grand Harbour and, one that many of the managers and employees interviewed, associated this with either the appointment of a new General Manager, or the introduction of *Shine*, or the

two events in combination. The process of change was described as more continuous and ongoing than could be solely attributed to these two specific episodes. The behaviour of the hotel's management in promoting continuous change is described further in chapters 7 and 8. Whatever the nature of the change, the outcome was very clear for their Human Resources Manager:

"De Vere Grand Harbour: just a wonderful place to be, I think. Standards are higher, people are happier. It's just so different, even down to walking down the back corridor and seeing how clean it is, to how we deal and welcome our guests" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 7).

The story at Royal Bath had been less conclusive. While those interviewed had seen changes the impact on everyday working was uncertain, Royal Bath Food Controller, summarised:

"I think it's the people who work here that make more of a difference than anything that is coming from up top, unless it's a major change. Although there have been big changes, nothing to affect my working day enough to say that it is much better or much worse" (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 16).

## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has presented how the managers and employees in De Vere Group conceived of change, and made sense of alterations in their working environment. Two significant change events were 'imposed' on the hotel employees during the period of my fieldwork. These were described by many of my interviewees as if they were 'out of the ordinary' episodes in the story of De Vere. However, managers and employees described this episodic change as having taken place coincident with many other operational and personnel developments, each one constituting a further episode or change event. With many events simultaneously occurring the descriptions of change had characteristics of another conception of change, where movement was the norm and organizational stability an illusion. This continuous change perspective was more suited to many of the alterations in language, behaviour and working relationships experienced in De Vere. Episodic and continuous change were two ideas, or frameworks, both in evidence in the sensemaking

of managers' and employees' organizational experiences. Considering these complimentary notions, rather than competing alternatives, may help tell a compelling story of the experiences of managers and employees in De Vere.

Events, such as *Shine* or the takeover by AHG, led to a change in the 'official' organizational narrative. The behaviour of managers influenced the stories told, the language used and working relationships, and created a continuing alteration in understanding and performance. Emerging patterns, or common themes, can be viewed through these stories, which tell a complex and fragmented narrative, as individuals idiosyncratically make sense of their experiences of change. The story of the experiences of organizational change is deepened in the next chapter as responses to change are explored.



## 6. STORIES ABOUT RESPONSES TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

De Vere Group managers and employees expressed many differing responses to the changes taking place, when interviewed during my fieldwork. Some of these responses were classified by De Vere's senior managers as 'negative', interpreted as unhelpful in some way, either to the individual or the organization, or both. This included reactions classified as resistance, or a cause of resistance, to the changes being implemented. Not all those interviewed described their experiences of organizational change negatively, however. Many responses were considered, by managers and employees, as 'positive', a sign of acceptance of the change, or even engagement with what the senior managers were attempting to achieve. However, the interpretations of these reactions were not always clear cut; for example, Grand Harbour Personal Assistant described a strong response from one member of staff:

"if you upset [her], the whole building will know about it. She's very good at her job, very good and she's very passionate. I think that's one thing you can actually say about a lot of people in this building, they're very passionate and I think passion and frustration can sometimes run quite close side by side. You can be seen to be going off your rocker, but you're not, it's just your passion about what you're trying to achieve and I'm probably quite a good example of that. I get very frustrated with things and my frustration makes me kind of shout and rant a bit, but it's only because I care about what's happening" (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 12).

The Personal Assistant's interpretation of anger and frustration, expressed by her and others, has in her view, passion as its underlying driver, which could be interpreted as commitment and engagement, rather than resistance. However, the behaviours associated with anger and frustration could as easily be taken as negative, or as resisting the senior managers' intended changes. The De Vere Group Marketing Director described a different 'positive' use for the 'resistance' of General Managers:

"[the Group Revenue Manager] and I sat down the other day and talked about it. I said, 'look who do we think would be the most difficult general manager right? The one who we think would have the



biggest problem with this. Right, let's talk to him first. Let's get at least some sense of what we think we want to do. Go and talk to him and let him absolutely destroy it so that we start with all of the problems and all of the issues fully on the table before we even get to the next base of trying to get a formed opinion in our mind'" (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 21).

This chapter presents the different responses to the organizational changes in De Vere, described by interviewees. The attribution of the labels 'positive' or 'negative' were troublesome, both for interviewees, and for me in constructing this chapter. Early versions of the chapter were highly fragmented, more a list of reactions than a coherent story. In part, this reflects the highly personal nature of responses to organizational change, and their interpretation. This, to some degree, appropriately reflects the diversity of reaction. However, there were some patterns when the data were considered at a group, or organizational level. Responses were, almost entirely, to the change events or episodes, with the alterations best described by the notion of continuous change less evident. There were significantly more negative reactions expressed than positive, in large part due to the uncertainty experienced following the takeover of De Vere by AHG. The positive reactions were in the main in response to *Shine*, and because of the lower volume of these, there is a risk that *Shine* has a reduced presence in this chapter, in comparison the rest of the thesis.

The comparison of the reactions to these two change events, *Shine* and the AHG takeover, was interesting, as each could have been considered as either positive or negative, depending on the interpretation given. The way in which sense was made of the changes and, in particular, how the organizational narratives were constructed around each event, provide possible explanations for the reactions. The absence of any 'official' story to aid individual sense making following the AHG takeover, could be interpreted as increasing the uncertainty and fear of what the future may bring. There were 'unofficial' common narratives, developed by managers and employees, though these had, typically, strong negative connotations. *Shine* was a fully articulated

‘official’ story and, unless the narrative was rejected, as it was by some, positive sense was made of the consequential change. These impacts were consistent across locations and organizational hierarchy. While the sense making needs were different for managers and employees, with people in more senior organizational levels requiring greater complexity in the story, all levels responded in similar positive or negative ways to the change events. Similarly, both positive and negative responses were in evidence at Grand Harbour and Royal Bath, in spite of the possible interpretation of *Shine* as more ‘successful’ at Grand Harbour.

The stories of differing reactions to organizational change are told, firstly, through the ‘negative’ responses (section 6.2) and then the ‘positive’ responses (section 6.3). The interviewees’ explanations of these reactions of employees and managers are then presented (section 6.4) as they attempted to make sense of what they saw and experienced. The chapter is then concluded with a short summary (section 6.5).

## **6.2 ‘NEGATIVE’ RESPONSES TO CHANGE**

### **6.2.1 Uncertainty and Anxiety**

A commonly expressed reaction to the changes taking place in De Vere was uncertainty. This included uncertainty of job role, as voiced by the Human Resources Assistant from Grand Harbour, describing her concerns following the regional ‘clustering’ of Human Resources:

“we’ve been a lot in limbo, and it’s been quite a long time, and I want to know what I’m going to have to do, because I’m going to have to take on Training” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 10).

Having experienced some change, interviewees expressed an expectation of more to come in the future, even when there was no specific reason:

“a slight feeling that there is something around the corner that we don’t know about. I don’t know. There is a slight feeling of uncertainty ... but I can’t put my finger on at all” (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 14);

“some of the people are feeling anxious, to be honest, and I think that’s more junior and middle management level ... it is a ripple effect. It does take time, but I think there has been an incredible amount of change in organization structure, in some high profile people” (De Vere Hotels Marketing Brand Manager, T7: 15).

This sense of uncertainty for the future was echoed by a Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, saying: “we don’t know who else is around the corner” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 10). For some members of the organization, the feelings of uncertainty appeared related to their perception of change as episodic, in that there was a supposition that there would be a stable period to follow:

“You can’t settle because you haven’t been told it’s settled, so how can you settle? You’re always going to think, ‘What have they got in mind?’ If you don’t meet targets one month, are you going to be absorbed or are you out of a job?” (Grand Harbour Room Service Manager, T27: 9).

This point of view expressed the, frequently made, response to organizational uncertainty of individual worry and anxiety. The Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager provided another example of this link:

“Everybody is just waiting to see, that’s the problem, the uncertainty. Nobody likes uncertainty, do they? Everybody’s just waiting to see and everybody’s trying to perform and it’s just like, ‘Oh God, I’m not going to be good enough!’” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 18).

The takeover by AHG created this type of personal anxiety at all organizational levels:

“[The General Manager] was worried about himself, to be honest with you. We had a few conversations and, I think, it does unnerve him” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 11);

“I’ve been through a sale before ... people get quite insecure. They don’t know what’s going on, and the uncertainty is quite an awful situation to be in” (Grand Harbour Operations Manager, T33: 6);

“I think they are worried because you do not know where the drop is going to go next” (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T40: 7).

The Grand Harbour General Manager confirmed his own reactions, and his subsequent regaining of confidence, which he hoped not only gave him a sense of control over his personal future, but also the ability to influence changes more widely:

“I don’t deny that I went through the stages of uncertainty, lack of confidence, and I had to take steps to rebuild that because I want to enjoy what I do. I regained that confidence, in fact, that confidence now possibly shows and makes those guys [at AHG] say, ‘That guy, he’s got a point, possibly’” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 4).

According to the Food Services Manager at Royal Bath the uncertainty was a cause of a change of behaviour by his managers:

“It’s all cloak and dagger stuff, it’s just all behind locked doors ... people are just waiting around, waiting for a call to get to the Central Office or into the office and... it’s not a nice place to work at the moment” (Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 2).

Uncertainty and anxiety were emotions I also experienced, whilst conducting my research at De Vere, brought on by the same organizational changes as described by my interviewees.

### **Vignette 6.1 – My PhD in Jeopardy**

There had been quiet corridor conversations about a potential sale of De Vere for some time, but the first I formally heard in the summer of 2006 was in the Financial Times newspaper. My first thoughts were of *Shine* and the potential impact on ongoing consultancy support that might be jeopardised by a change of ownership. I did not consider the impact on my PhD research until the takeover had been confirmed and it became clear that my sponsors – the Chief Executive, Operations Director and Human Resources Director – were not going to survive the change. The Chief Executive, was expected to leave, as would be normal in such a takeover, and he had talked openly about this during my interview in back July. The Operations Director was offered a job, but not one he felt able to accept and the Human Resources Director was simply replaced by her counterpart at AHG. All left comfortably compensated, both as shareholders in De Vere and for their loss of office, so I felt justified in my sudden anxiety brought on by the uncertainty of my future research. I had collected my first set of data from an intended three visits.

Over the following months my concerns grew as the Central Office staff were made redundant, progressively removing both my Central Office interview group and my remaining contacts. Consulting work ceased. The new regime did not want advisors to their predecessors, which was obvious after an uncomfortable meeting or two with the new People and Development Director.

Initially my anxiety caused me to freeze. I did not know what to do. If I approached the new regime with my plans for continuing my research, then I felt there was a risk that they would not agree to allow me to continue. However, I had only completed thirty interviews, insufficient for a PhD data set. I began talking to my PhD Supervisor about the real possibility of starting again, not something he recommended! At the same time I could see the opportunity (and the irony) of the impact of change on my research and, of course, on me. I was now making sense of change in my own situation. I sought the advice of the General Manager at Grand Harbour, someone who I felt I could trust. He offered to sponsor my continued interviewing at his hotel and took it on himself to talk to his counterpart at Royal Bath on my behalf. I saw the start of 2007 with a renewed confidence that my anxiety had been unfounded. I had begun planning my next visit in the spring, confident that I had two new sponsors, when I heard that the Royal Bath General Manager had been removed from his role. I was waiting for a flight at Edinburgh Airport, when he called me with the news. The uncertainty was back, and the anxiety with it...

### **6.2.2 Shock and Fear**

The redundancies at Grand Harbour and Royal Bath were a significant source of negative responses, from both managers and employees. The most common reaction was a fear of losing their job: “I think people go, ‘When is it going to be my turn?’” (Grand Harbour Room Service Manager, T27: 3). At Grand Harbour, this concern was voiced in open meetings with employees, the General Manager recalled:

“One [employee] had more courage than the others and the question was, ‘Boss, who’s going to be next?’ This is not just a couple of changes we’re talking about: from Reservations, to HR, and now, the chef – and they can see that over a period of time there’s a reshaping of the organization and it’s impacting the managers on the floor much closer

than ever before in any change in the organization” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 6).

Once again, the fear was described as being associated with uncertainty regarding the future:

“it is ... a bit insecure and no one really knows what is going to happen next and particularly when redundancies are [happening] ... that is quite scary for people” (Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, T38: 14).

This anxiety was expressed, by the Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, as a cause of alterations in political behaviour:

“people are fearing their jobs I think as well, and everyone knows they have to perform, otherwise, they will be out basically. That’s causing people to kind of backstab each other a little bit ... You make one mistake and obviously you can get away with it, but it’s not so appreciated if you make a mistake. You’ve got to make you sure you don’t make any mistakes” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 15).

The departure of the General Manager at Royal Bath had a significant impact on how managers and employees felt about the future. As the Food Services Manager explained, the General Manager’s departure was unexpected:

“Just nobody really knows what’s going on. One minute everything’s happy, moving along, the hotel made more profit last year and within a month of that, the General Manager gets the heave-ho because he did not fit in with their [AHG’s] plans” (Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 2).

The Group Reservations Manager echoed this reaction: “the way [the General Manager] was kind of like ‘shown the door’, it was such a shock” (Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager, T60: 32). Such an unforeseen change increased the fear of the future for the Royal Bath Revenue Manager:

“Completely out of the blue! I mean he was a brilliant GM, from my perspective, brilliant GM. He kept me motivated. He kept my team motivated. You know, we are profitable. We delivered everything that we should have delivered and it was just like, ‘Okay, they are getting rid of [our General Manager]’ No one is really safe” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 7).

Serving customers well, in a climate of future uncertainty, was described as a challenge by the Royal Bath Food Services Manager:

“they want to stay cheerful and focused, and motivated ... to do a fantastic job, while you’re looking over your shoulder for the next redundancy” (Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 10).

The combination of uncertainty and fear, following the AHG takeover, and subsequent redundancies, was a frequent response to change at all hierarchical levels.

### **6.2.3 Grief, Frustration and Mistrust**

The redundancies were not only a source of fear, with some interviewees describing reactions expressing a sense of loss or grief:

“I feel sorry for a lot of people that were made redundant from here before Christmas. Some of them had been here for a little while. Some have been here for a long, long time, had given their heart and soul to the hotel and it wasn’t enough. It’s just really, really sad that people who have worked their backsides off the company where just sort of cast aside. And that’s sad” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 25).

Once again, this was evident in the departure of the Royal Bath General Manager:

“But, at the moment, it’s kind of like, ‘We want [our General Manager] back’ and it’s still that kind of frame of mind. We need to sort of snap out of it” (Royal Bath Group Reservation Manager, T60: 3).

Rather than sadness, some responses to organizational changes contained anger or resentment. For example, the Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager, referred to the reactions of long serving employees to the introduction of new people:

“I think to use the word resentment is not quite the right word, but in some ways it is because people resent some of the new people coming in because their friends have gone and it has broken the chain and while you’ve got that element that still is living in the past” (Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager, T22: 2).

For the Former Royal Bath General Manager his anger was directed at the Directors of AHG, who he saw as lacking credibility to give advice, given

another chain of hotels associated with AHG's leadership was not understood to be profitable:

"The fact was that we all found was that Hotel du Vin don't make any money, so don't come and tell us how to make money. It was a little bit of resentment on that" (Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 3).

The Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager saw the AHG Director's behaviour as arrogant, and she resented the apparent lack of respect for her capabilities:

"And this is where the arrogance comes in and you'd actually feel ... 'Do you value me? Do you want me in this business? Because actually I really value myself and I won't replace myself and thank you, if you don't particularly want me'" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 13).

The Directors of AHG were a focal point for many negative reactions, following their takeover. For Heads of Department and employees, this was based on the stories being told about these directors, in the absence of either personal contact or 'official' communication. However, as this 'small story' demonstrates, personal interaction did not always help reduce the negative responses.

#### **Small Story 6.1 – 'I'm not paid to take that crap'**

"There's one chap ... He is one of the directors [of AHG]. He wanted to stay here for a night and we were fully booked. And if we were going to get a room back then I was to call him by 2 o'clock to let him know. And it happened to be that I was on switchboard and the call came in and he goes - he didn't know who I was from Adam - and he said, 'This is [first name] here. Someone was meant to call me this afternoon to let me know about a room, but can you tell him not to bother because I don't want the room after all. Thank you. Bye.' And he was so rude. And I thought, 'My God!' You know, if they want our staff to treat our customers with respect, then they need to start treating the staff with a little bit of respect. You know, I thought if I was switchboard operator and somebody spoke to me like that, I'd go absolutely bananas. I'm not paid to take that crap. I think that's where my images of them [AHG], I think, coming from" (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 18).



One implication of the attribution of negative responses to the AHG Directors was increasing stories of mistrust, in them and their leadership. For the Royal Bath General Manager, this was typically related to a lack of action:

“they have come down three, four times and nothing gets done ... Do they have credibility within the team? Probably not anymore. Do they have credibility in the industry? It is a laughing stock” (Royal Bath General Manager, T64: 4).

For the Royal Bath Front of House Manager it was shifts in direction or alterations in decisions that were the source of concern:

“I have even heard rumor that they [AHG] are going to now, after all the re-branding of De Vere Deluxe and putting in all these new wonderful things, they are going to be getting rid of all those. Now if you think about it, they bought iPod docking stations for every single room. They bought bathrobes for every single room, Egyptian cotton bedding and toweling for every single room, and new hair dryers, new hair straighteners, new kettles, pretty much you name it, new cosmetic items to go into the room, and now they are going to drop all of it? How much is that cost them?” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T64: 15).

For the new General Manager at Royal Bath, the build up of frustration, during this period after the takeover, could not be tolerated for long, before individuals would consider leaving the organization:

“People will accept the fact that 12, 18 months of frustration, but after that you have to question your own position and your own career” (Royal Bath General Manager, T64: 4).

This was, perhaps, an example of the tolerance of the employees and managers of De Vere being eroded over time, as they were unable to make sense of the changes they were experiencing, without seeking to blame the people they saw as responsible. This led to further negative behaviour.

#### **6.2.4 Cynicism and Skepticism**

As well as fear, uncertainty, resentment and mistrust, managers and employees of De Vere also responded cynically to the takeover by AHG. The

General Manager at Grand Harbour, shared a perspective of his counterpart at Royal Bath, reported earlier, concerning the comparison of De Vere Hotels to the Hotel du Vin chain:

“[AHG are] just saying, ‘This is how we should be operating a hotel [like Hotel du Vin]’. Well, actually, I love those hotels, but they’re not hotels, they’re restaurants with accommodation. There is a difference. They haven’t got any conference rooms, they haven’t got a banquet, and if you switch on the light pretty high, you can see that there’s a hell of a lot of dust. So, we’re doing things in a different way” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 16).

The Human Resources Manager at Grand Harbour counseled herself against being cynical during the period of new corporate ownership:

“I don’t really want to lie awake at night worrying about it and I think that you have to put that positive slant on it. You know, cynicism can eat you up and it’s not going to be particularly healthy for you, for your career. It will end up causing you detrimental effect on how you do your job on a day-to-day basis” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 3).

However, her reaction to the new Human Resources regime was illustrated by her response to a meeting organised by AHG:

“it was just a bit of a flowery meeting about nothing and it didn’t give me any answers - a bit of a waste of time. We had to put pictures on a wall and pick out the things that motivated us and do a group exercise and I just thought ‘you’re watching us, don’t treat me for a fool’” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 12).

It was not the takeover, though, that generated most stories of cynical responses; it was *Shine*. For some interviewees *Shine* was not designed for them, but for other employees, as described by the Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager:

“You become slightly cynical about some of these programmes ... because you’ll not necessarily get anything from it yourself ... but [what] a simpler person, somebody who is just coming in and doing their work, gets out of it is totally different because they’re looking at it from a different perspective. It’s really fun for them, it’s a bit of training that’s directed at them, it’s there at work but yet they’re doing the training thing and that’s a huge, huge thing” (Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager, T22: 4).

A Royal Bath Porter described the programme as a means to get him, and his colleagues, to work harder, in the same way as previous management initiatives:

“it is just like pushing people to ... to try harder ...we have before the ‘Employee of the Month’ so now there’s this *Shine* stuff, it’s the same. It is just a different name of it” (Royal Bath Porter, T46: 4).

Similarities with other management approaches were a source of skepticism for others too. The Reservations Supervisor, also from Royal Bath, recalled a previous version of organizational values:

“I think we’re all a bit skeptical in the fact that ... we had ‘Royal’ cards and ‘Royal’ was sort of broken down to meaning different things” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 12).

For other interviewees, the style of the *Shine* events was more their source of concern:

“A lot of the guys who work here are highly intelligent people who are studying at university who have come from foreign countries who had to learn the language in order to earn some money for their family. So, it’s extremely difficult to get that level of people to actually buy in to it [*Shine*]. And I think sometimes it’s bit too...whoopy” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 12-13).

Others, simply, did not see the point: “I can’t understand why we need *Shine*. If we are doing our job properly ... that’s a waste of time” (Royal Bath Maintenance Manager, T49: 4-5). For the Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor her skepticism was not related to the *Shine* events themselves, but to the implementation of change following them:

“it’s sort of all well and good saying that we want to make all these changes and everything it’s all gonna be great, but in six months we’ll forget about it” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 5).

For the Housekeeping Supervisor at Grand Harbour the workshop was an important form of recognition, but she acknowledged the cynicism of others, prior to attending:

“it’s nice to be recognised, because, I think, before, people were saying, ‘You do these courses and oh, it’s just going to get swept under the carpet’ or ‘It’s only a load of talk, basically’” (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T32: 3).

This skeptical response, to centrally organized events, was not restricted to *Shine*, as the programme that followed, *Verve*, received a similar response from some:

“But going back to *Verve*, I’m always slightly skeptical of these things. They’re useful for some people and not so useful for others and *Verve*, it just seems to be a few more different buzzwords” (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 3).

The root of a cynical point of view was, for some managers and employees, a belief that in spite of attempts to bring about change there were certain problems or difficulties that would remain constant, no matter what:

“It [the hotel] will still have the same old problems. It will still have the breakfast chef not turning out for breakfast” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 21).

And that the drivers for change were an inevitable, repeating pattern:

“Well basically what is happening at the moment is and ... it has happened every single year, being you are getting towards the end of your periods and they start panicking that there is not enough business on the books so therefore staff get cut” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T64: 15).

This reaction, perhaps, challenges the relevance of the centrally designed initiatives, such as *Shine* and *Verve*, to address the priorities perceived by managers and employees in the hotels. While *Shine* was received by many interviewees positively, as described in section 6.3, the main ‘negative’ reaction was one of cynicism. This could be interpreted as a rejection of the narrative of *Shine*, a refusal by managers and employees to accept the ‘official’ story.

#### **6.2.5 Rebellion and Humour**

For some managers and employees the response to change was more active than cynical, with them describing themselves, or others, as doing things that

they believed they should not. The Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager described her rebellious response to the anxiety and frustration she felt:

“With regards to my job here, I don’t think it’s safe. I don’t enjoy my job anymore. I don’t like what I do. I spend half of my time doing things that I shouldn’t do because I prefer to do them” (Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager, T60: 30).

It was recognised by some that this type of behaviour was not going to be tolerated by senior managers: “There are some people that are taking the piss a bit. I think those people won’t be long for here” (Grand Harbour Restaurant Supervisor, T19: 5). Yet the senior managers within the hotels, had also recognised that achieving what they wished to during this period, may also have required them to rebel, and to act without the knowledge or permission of head office. The replacement General Manager at Royal Bath summarised:

“we are very proud and we want to make it work and, if it that means we have to do it ourselves, quickly by hook [or by crook], then we will do it” (Royal Bath General Manager, T64: 3).

An indirect form of rebellion was the use by interviewees of humour. It was often employed to express disagreement or displeasure with decisions that had been taken by people more senior. For instance, the choice to centralise the reservation booking team in Warrington, rather than have it operated locally by each hotel, prompted the following response from the Royal Bath Revenue Manager: “You are not hearing the seagulls in the background. You are hearing cars on the M6” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 5). A more frequent use of light hearted responses, was in dealing with individual’s anxiety or, in the case of the exiting General Manager of Royal Bath, personal loss:

“Somebody rang me and said ‘you’re not the only one’ [to lose their job]. I said, ‘[One of the other General Managers] got it as well’. ‘How did you know that?’ I said, ‘his name is above me in the visitor’s book.’ So it’s sort of a black humour around the whole thing” (Royal Bath General Manager, T53: 14).

The theme of job loss prompted humorous responses at Grand Harbour too:

“Yeah, well lots of people left. I don’t think it’s his fault, but some people are making jokes that since [the new General Manager] came, people left, especially managers” (Grand Harbour Restaurant Supervisor, T19: 12).

For the Room Service Manager at Grand Harbour humour was used to relieve the stress of her job:

“I was really stressed out one night, and I was really busy, and I was short staffed, and I was running the trolleys all around the hotel, and I kept meeting the same drunk in the lift. It didn’t matter what lift I was going up, the main lift, the glass lift, whatever, he seemed to be there and he said, ‘I’ve got a problem, I’m locked out,’ I said, ‘I’ve got a problem as well, I’m short staffed. Maybe we can meet in the middle,’ this is funny, this” (Grand Harbour Room Service Manager, T15: 4).

The centrally initiated change programmes of *Shine* and *Verve* were the source of banter amongst employees, for example a Royal Bath Porter, in his broken Polish English, described a ‘play-on-words’ for *Shine*:

“most of the employees generally can’t do anything about that. We just accept it. Well now we kind of laugh at it ... There is a *Shine* way of doing things so we’re always saying, ‘*Shine* up my arse’. That’s how it is” (Royal Bath Porter, T46: 6).

Other employees were reported as not taking the programmes seriously, though, as a Reservations Supervisor from Grand Harbour implies, this may have been related to their difficulty in understanding some of the content:

“I think people sort of laugh about it most of the time. It’s got some good points to it. I personally didn’t fully understand what they were but it was a good first effort for that sort of training. I think people were just sort of laughing. That was bad because people didn’t take it particularly seriously” (Grand Harbour Reservations Supervisor, T16: 4).

Alternatively, it could be interpreted as simply a developed cynicism:

“They concentrate on their own work and they’re kind of very skeptical [about *Verve*] and all that sort of stuff, so there’s a lot of banter about it and what not” (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 3).

Whether a direct rebellion or the ‘safer’ challenge of turning the situation into a joke, these active responses were deployed by managers and employees

alike, though there was a higher frequency of humorous responses from the lower hierarchical levels within De Vere. In contrast, the stories of a passive or resigned response to the AHG takeover were confined more to the management populations within the hotels.

### **6.2.6 Resignation and Passive Responses**

The imposition of changes, especially following the AHG takeover, had the effect of disempowering even on the most senior of hotel management: “I think there was a numbness that went around the hotel when that happened” (Royal Bath Maintenance Manager, T63: 6). The outwardly positive Grand Harbour General Manager was resigned to following instructions, with which he did not agree:

“you’re not involved ... I see what they’re trying to achieve. I don’t think the structure is what I would do personally, but we have to do it” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 3).

The Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager was blunter in describing the need to fit in with changes, or face the consequences:

“Well, I think basically like they’re changing things, and if you don’t agree with the way it’s going, then there’s a feeling that you’ll end up leaving” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 3).

She was also resigned to an expectation that the new owners would be introducing their own managers and employees into the business:

“If you were to come back in a year’s time, I image you wouldn’t find a lot of the same people here. I would’ve thought they’ll bring in a lot of their own staff, all managers anyway” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 6).

For others, like the Royal Bath Food Services Manager, it did not matter how hard you tried there was still little or no praise:

“Sometimes we have three hundred people on a Sunday breakfast, and five people might complain that something was missing on the buffet, or they’ll have to wait while three hundred people are in a room together. You obviously will get some of that and what happened there is, ‘... what’s going on?’ Five people out of three hundred, it’s a damn good ratio. I think it’s not just in this industry, it just seems that

there's never enough pats on the back for a job well done, but they'll jump on you when something goes wrong" (Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 11).

As well as describing being resigned to a particular future or way of working, the hotel management also gave more general examples of a passive resistance to change. This was evident before the change in ownership of De Vere, and was described, by the Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager, as an apathetic approach by employees to getting involved in the daily running of the business:

"The buy-in here is really difficult – getting people to buy into what you want to do. The daily brief is a fine example of that. People are supposed to put information into it, it's a struggle to get them to do it, so you end up doing it yourself, which is not quite how it is supposed to be" (Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager, T22: 1).

The Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager elaborated further, and suggested that this same passive response was also preventing employees taking the initiative to adjust old routines, even when presented with the evidence that change was required:

"they're brand new meeting rooms, they've got new carpets and everything else, well they need a good vacuuming, but they're not getting done because that's not seen as part of the way forward because they never used bother before" (Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager, T22: 2-3).

This was still a theme for her, at a later interview, she said: "people came out of *Shine* and thought well, 'I can make a difference' and I am not sure there is still that same mentality at the moment" (Grand Harbour Guest Services Manager, T35: 6). The Guest Service Manager was citing the impact of the change of corporate ownership as a source of passive behaviour. The uncertainty of how to behave in the new regime was identified by the Assistant Food Services Manager at Royal Bath, as causing a 'wait and see' approach:

"But I don't really know what's the best thing to do, to be honest. I think most people know are just sort of biding their time to assess out that the situation's actually is. A lot of people are quite worried .... but



then I think they're also thinking it could be really good for me if I do hang on and be successful" (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 6).

The shift in leadership style, by the AHG Directors, was described by the Royal Bath Operations Manager as having stopped the continuation of certain changes. However, he saw this as a short term, or transitional, situation:

"I think things were changing, but since they [AHG] took over, they were blown out of the water because of the way that they work ... the way they do things is not right, really, and until that settles down and they start being very proactive and motivating with all the teams... I don't know, in six months' time, come and see me again, and it will be hunky-dory" (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T57: 14).

The Royal Bath Food Services Manager was succinct in summarising many of the comments on how to behave in changing times: "You just keep your head down and you just keep doing your job to the best of your ability" (Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 11).

#### **Small Story 6.2 - 'You have to bite your tongue'**

"I think, for me personally, the thing is I care about the Royal Bath as a hotel and as a customer focused business. I've worked here six years and, obviously, started operationally and, even being part of the sales team, I still care about the customer. Okay, my sort of aspirations in the job is revenue and it's all money, money, money, but at the same time, I do care how the guests are being treated ... Verve does contradict themselves a little bit in the sense that ... they want all these big wows for the customer, yet, they are still making, in my opinion, some huge errors along the way. But it certainly not my position to say to them because they'll say, "If you don't like it, there's the door." So, you kind of have to bite your tongue a bit and just kind of make best of what you've got. I don't know. I think they are trying to concentrate so much on sort of improving operations and food offerings and drink offerings and things. But I don't think they've actually got it all into the big picture properly. I think they've got some really key things there, just huge errors that could have easily been fixed" (Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager, T60: 17).

While the majority of stories told were about negative responses, there were significant numbers of positive examples too. Many of these were in reaction to *Shine* though, rather than towards AHG, the new owners of De Vere.

### **6.3 'POSITIVE' RESPONSES TO CHANGE**

#### **6.3.1 Enthusiasm and Engagement**

Enthusiasm was a common response from all levels of managers and employees to the *Shine* programme. One Grand Harbour Reservations Supervisor was excited by the possibility of increased contact with hotel guests: "I love it because you will get the interaction with the guests, and everyone is very friendly" (Grand Harbour Reservations Supervisor, T37: 4). *Shine* gave broader visibility, to De Vere managers and employees, of the connections between different parts of the organization. This 'bigger picture' was a source of enthusiasm for a Management Trainee at Royal Bath:

"It is good for everyone. It is like a community, everyone is involved ... be it Head Office to ... casuals that work here. Everyone is involved in the same team and it is just to make everyone know that we are special. We are a special company and what we do here is valued" (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50 : 4).

Another source of positive reaction came from the increase in people's understanding of why De Vere was approaching the business in the way it was, as a Grand Harbour Telephonist explained: "the youngsters, I think, they got more involved, they can see why it was happening, why we were doing that" (Grand Harbour Telephonist, T24: 7). A Human Resources Assistant from Royal Bath had difficulty articulating her reaction, but the experience was clearly a positive one:

"I found it was quite sort of, the actual *Shine* sessions, was quite sort of ... motivational really and it made everyone sort of go away and really be like, 'Yeah!'" (Royal Bath Human Resources Assistant, T51 : 10).

Others, including one Reservations Supervisor, made comparisons to previous programmes: "I mean I certainly think it's a lot better than anything we've

every done before. And I think that's purely because Central Office is behind it" (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 12).

### **Small Story 6.3 - 'He just never complains'**

[The Maintenance Manager] ... well there's a couple [of examples of his enthusiasm], one was ... was bank holiday. Bank holiday Monday. Out with his wife and we look after the security of the Dormy [a local, former De Vere hotel] and he got called that the alarm was going off. So, or was it flooding, so on bank holiday Monday he just goes over and fixes it, he's on his day off. He came in on his birthday when he'd been at his barbecue, birthday barbecue for nine hours. And totally incapable of actually fixing anything, but still came in. ... and then we had a problem a couple of nights ago when he came in at 3 o'clock in the morning. I was up, I rang him up, apologised, but it still meant getting out of bed and ... we were sitting in the lounge at 4 o'clock in the morning having a cup of coffee, chatting about the world and it was, you know, it was one of those, almost special sort of moments. He just never complains" (Royal Bath General Manager, T43: 18).

Optimism was described by interviewees as a factor interpreting organizational changes constructively. This was typified by a Restaurant Supervisor in her description of responding to the daily challenges of working in a busy restaurant:

"I'm positive person, but I'm trying to be even more positive. Every single day you have to face lots and lots of problems in the restaurant. People don't turn up for shifts and you've got busy, busy lunches and ... if you're going to think negative, you will never do it, so instead of, you know, moaning and just sitting down and you know thinking, 'I'm not going to' just taking actions and it's going to resolve it positively" (Grand Harbour Restaurant Supervisor, T19: 4).

This positive attitude was reflected for two managers who both were facing imposed changes in their roles. Firstly, the Human Resources Manager at Grand Harbour, whose role was being eliminated, had the possibility of being considered for a Regional Human Resources position:

"I'm not a hundred percent convinced where they're trying to get to, ultimately without any presence on property is really the right route, but I'm going to remain open-minded to it ... I think there is a risk if you

go in with the intention that that's how it's going to be. I think you have to try and influence wherever you possibly can and with all new roles, there is also the opportunity, quite newly created, to try and shape that as you want it to be" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 4).

At Royal Bath, the Operations Manager was facing his role being reduced in scope by the introduction of a Food and Beverage Director, as traditionally the Executive Chef reported to the Operations Manager:

"If you've got some guy who's a fantastic chef and he can drive it... I'm not a fantastic chef, but I must be good in something, or else I wouldn't be where I am, really, so, it's just refocusing, really. My role is about mentoring, training, development, finance, revenue management, sales, which, for me, is going to be fantastic because that would polish me off to be ready for GM [General Manager], basically, which would be good" (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T57: 7).

#### **Small Story 6.4 – 'Her reward is we've promoted her to the position'**

"[She has] just taken control. You know, it's been a very, very difficult phase in the kitchen. She was on a level of kind of Sous Chef and above her she had a manager, you know her line manager was the Premier Sous and then his boss was the Exec Chef. She was doing better than he was. He's had a wake up call, simply because she's taken on her own: 'If you're not going to show off, I am!' And she has and she's finishing things, she's a finisher and she gets things done and her reward is we've promoted her to the position. And her reward is in the last three months we've given her difference of pay from what she's on to what he was on. You know what, thanks very much, that's 600 quid in her packet.

Thank you because you've actually helped me get through this difficult phase of not having a leader in the kitchen. You've maintained standards. You've actually improved standards. And she has, she's thrown menus at me, she wants to change menus. 'You know, slow down because an exec chef's going to come in and want to change and put his own stamp on it. Let's prioritise' ... there's no stopping her at the moment ... she's a key figure in the business at the moment, it's up to me to keep her like that when I'm recruiting the Exec Chef because you could knock it on its head ... and actually waste it but to go through the tough times ... you've gone through, something's kept her motivation there" (Grand Harbour Operations Manager, T20: 8).

Some of the interviewees from De Vere described their experiences as increased their connection, or engagement, with the organization. This was particularly true of the responses to *Shine*. A Reservations Supervisor identified a shift in her attitude, during her involvement in the *Shine* workshop, and a change that had an impact on returning to her job:

“I think when you go to *Shine*, I think you figure it out ... you go in there thinking ‘God!’ but then when you come out you’re thinking ‘Yes!’. You feel a bit more positive. I don’t think it’s a conscious thing, to be honest with you. I think it just comes subconsciously. You just come out and do it” (Grand Harbour Reservations Supervisor, T16: 3).

A Restaurant Supervisor at Grand Harbour also explained the influence of *Shine* beyond the workshops, and an increase in her engagement with the organization: “since you start wearing this [*Shine* Star badge] you feel more responsible” (Grand Harbour Restaurant Supervisor, T19: 3). After the redundancies, some of the ‘survivors’ took the opportunities presented by the loss of their colleagues. The Grand Harbour Operations Manager told the story of one employee who responded to the departure of the Executive Chef:

“[She is] in the kitchen, she’s kind of number two position. She’s really kind of risen to the occasion and taken this as an opportunity to prove herself and show off what she can do” (Grand Harbour Operations Manager, T20: 8).

The takeover by AHG produced a passive response from many managers and employees, though, for the Guest Service Manager at Grand Harbour, it was a trigger for action and she explained how she refused to accept some of the proposed changes:

“I’ve come along and said, ‘Actually no, I’m not accepting it,’ and I can say, ‘This is why I’m not accepting it and this is what we’re going to do about it’ and we’ve done it. So even within the constraints of payroll and the budget, you know there’s that flexibility to move it as long as you’re brave enough to make those decisions and just do it.” (Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager, T22: 21).

It was alterations in behaviour over time that made increased engagement visible to some the members of the organization. The Human Resources Manager at Grand Harbour recalled the differences in the Heads of Department (HoD) meeting:

“we had an HoD meeting last week and you make a comparison to that HoD meeting as to one about a year ago, perhaps slightly more than a year ago. People were laughing together; they were sitting together; they were drinking together, whereas it was a lot of sub groups previously. It was back stabbing and bitching” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 7).

Enthusiasm and engagement were visible positive responses, and there were stories from all levels and locations. There was also an increase noted in the extent to which there was constructive challenge, both ways, between managers and employees. This was interpreted as a positive response by senior managers, particularly as a possible consequence of *Shine*.

### **6.3.2 Challenge and Debate**

The changes De Vere had been experiencing, up to the acquisition by AHG, had been lead by the Chief Executive of De Vere Group. He, personally, provided a role model of challenge and debate for the organization, as his Marketing Director explained:

“rationally he [the Chief Executive] understands that people don’t like it, but he finds it hard to connect with the concept that people might actually not like that situation and actually might much prefer to go to a meeting where everyone agrees and everything just sails through, whereas for [him] that would be kind of a complete waste of time. So he has, if anything, a reputation for being a ‘detailist’. He’s a ‘detailist’ [in] as much as ... his modus operandi is to challenge to detail, to such a level that he understands whether or not people have thought through the detail” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 22).

The encouragement of open discussion was a feature of the Marketing Director’s own management style: “I would try and resolve conflict by finding the right person to resolve it with and just have a debate” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 20). Challenge and discussion was becoming a feature of working in De Vere, as described by the Human Resources Director: “it’s a

very challenging organization in terms of, actually, the amount of challenge that you get from people” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 2). The corporate values, that formed part of the *Shine* programme, included ‘Straightforward’ and she had experienced an increase in the directness of people’s behaviour, since its introduction:

“I think there is more frank dialogue with people ... I think that people can ... be quite direct with people, with others and give some quite direct thoughts or feedback under that kind of banner of, ‘Well, I am just going to be straightforward with you’” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 1).

The opportunity to be open with points of view was also a change remarked upon within the hotels. A management trainee at Royal Bath explained:

“I know now that if I go to one of these meetings and I have something that I want to say I can say it and whatever I say is welcomed, be it bad or good, so that is definitely a good change. Because before I felt like I could not do that and now I can” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 11).

The AHG takeover of De Vere brought with it a shift in this level of open discussion. A Grand Harbour Personal Assistant recounted a very different, imaginary dialogue, one not encouraging of debate:

“‘You can’t have a Head Chef anymore; you now need a Food and Beverage Director’  
‘But that’s not going to work for us.’  
‘Well tough, because that’s the way its going to be, isn’t it?’  
It’s a little bit like that”  
(Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 25).

The General Manager at Grand Harbour, however, remained determined to challenge the new owners:

“if they ask me, I’ll challenge them and I’ll say, ‘I don’t disagree with what you’re doing, but I feel this is the way we should be doing it. If in the future you want my advice, ask me, because that’s why you pay me; you pay me a lot of money to use the expertise.’ I’m not shy of that; I’ll probably do it very constructively, but I hope they appreciate that and I hope that one day they’re going to say, ‘Well, we’ve got some really exciting and knowledgeable people in the hotel. They know what they have to do’” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 4).

The most noticeable pattern, amongst the rich diversity of individual response to organizational change, was the overwhelmingly negative reaction to the takeover of De Vere by AHG, and, in contrast, the majority of the fewer, positive stories were related to *Shine*. This may be attributable the nature of the changes being imposed, though the takeover contained aspects that could have been easily interpreted as opportunities, and *Shine* was imposing ‘controls’ that could have been perceived as threats. This suggests that the way sense was made of these significant events, and other changes, may have influenced the nature of individual responses.

## **6.4 MAKING SENSE OF RESPONSES TO CHANGE**

### **6.4.1 Personality as an Influence on Response to Change**

A recurring attitude expressed by interviewees was to consider reactions to change a product of individual personality: “there are those that will take you on board, deal with it and there are those that just ain’t interested in whatever you do” (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 16). The view that some people will change, and others will not, was repeated at different organizational levels:

“You’ll always get the people that it will fall on deaf ears because I think you’re either naturally a person that wants to be like that or you can be swayed or you get these people that just will not be any different, however much you tell them” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 6).

Interviewees identified length of service at the hotel as a cause of resistance to change. A Sales Coordinator at Grand Harbour explained:

“It has been quite a lot of change since I started, which for me is not necessarily a bad thing because I’ve only been here a short period of time and I hate to say it, but I’m not stuck in my ways of doing something, whereas perhaps people who’ve been in the same role for a few years perhaps get used to doing something one way and then change is perhaps slightly harder” (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T14: 2).



This group of longer serving employees was referred to as ‘the old school’ by the Guest Services Manager:

“you’ve got the little clique of the old school ... who will have their little comments about things that you just know harp back to a different day, a different time and they don’t want to embrace what is coming their way, which I think is stupid of them because ultimately their choice is to be here or not, and if they don’t want to make those changes then they’re quite clear, ‘You’re not the people in the position to be running this business’” (Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager, T22: 2).

One Human Resources Assistant offered an explanation as to why long serving employees reacted in the way they did:

“people that have been here the longest, definitely, found it really hard, because they didn’t want change. They’ve been here for so long, they didn’t want to go and find another job and they didn’t want to learn something else” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 16).

A Reservations Supervisor from Royal Bath offered a similar reason for ‘negative’ reactions to *Shine*: “I think a lot of the sort of longer standing staff they know that we’ve kind of been there, done that and it was all very similar” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 12). The Operations Manager at Grand Harbour, saw these same two distinct camps of people and his responsibility as to move people from one to the other:

“I’m not quite sure it’s a fifty fifty split, but you’ve got some people who think it’s just another thing that De Vere are trying to do, but you get other people that actually ... really, really buy into it ... You’ve seen it from one week into the next ... it’s like pulling teeth. You know it’s not so easy, but it was a hell of a lot harder even just a month ago” (Grand Harbour Operations Manager, T10: 6-7).

The Operations Manager counterpart at Royal Bath expressed a similar sense of personal responsibility for altering people’s views:

“You’ve got others who, you know, are ‘I’ve seen it all before’. Nothing’s going to change and that sort of thing ... [however] if you’ve got the personality you can show them whatever you want really” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T47: 8-9).

An individual dislike of change was expressed by some individuals:

“I’m, actually, not very good with change, to be honest with you, as a person because things were working nicely and then all of a sudden a situation has turned on to us that we have no choice on” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 9).

Others saw their responses being more related to other things that were happening for them at work or elsewhere, rather than an inherent dislike of change:

“I think before I was very disillusioned by a lot of things, but it is your own personal mindset thing, whether you are going to let it get to you or not. It got to me for awhile with specific things and now I just laugh it off” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T65: 3).

An alternative perspective, suggested by interviewees, was that the ‘difficult’ individuals for managers to deal with were that way generally, rather than as a consequence of the particular change taking place:

“there’s particular staff members ... I’d say about five or six that ... they’ve kind of got the management wrapped round their little finger ... I think it’s just their personalities. It’s just the way they are ... they’re very sort of outspoken ... they just have a presence ... it’s okay to kind of fight back at the management a little bit and it’s worked for them” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 27-28).

In contrast to placing the ‘cause’ of individual response with the underlying personality of the manager or the employee, other interviewees suggested responses were more circumstantial, depending on the difference between expectation and experience.

#### **6.4.2 Expectations as an Influence on Response to Change**

Managers and employees described how expectations not being met that had an important impact on their reactions to change. The *Shine* workshops set specific expectations of how managers would or, at least should, behave, especially through the articulation of the Corporate Values. A Restaurant Supervisor at Grand Harbour contrasted her expectations, after a *Shine* workshop, with her actual experience:

“Well sometimes it’s I think disadvantage is for the people who’ve been told certain things during the *Shine* training. And then it’s coming, you know, [to a] regular day and it doesn’t happen ... for example, ‘let’s have respect to each other’ and then one of the chefs is, you know, swearing at my team and you know really bringing them down which is not good” (Grand Harbour Restaurant Supervisor, T19: 6).

For some interviewees, the announcement of redundancies at the hotels came after lots of speculation and, therefore, it was a surprise that other employees’ expectations had not been similarly set:

“But there were people in there crying ... [they were] oblivious to all the gossip that’s been going on for the last six months. Surely, you must have expected and they just didn’t have a clue. It makes you think, how did they not know, when everyone... it was public knowledge what was, probably, going to happen. I was just quite shocked at how people didn’t realise it” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 17).

Though, as one of the individuals affected explained:

“When we heard about the takeover; there’s a lot of speculation, ‘What’s going to happen? This will happen, that will happen, jobs will be lost,’ and now I’m kind of thinking, ‘Just wait and see what happens.’ You can speculate as much you want, but until somebody says... but I really wasn’t expecting the day when they called us all for a chat, and said, ‘Oh, yes, I’m afraid that it’s being centralised, so, we’ll now go into a period of consultations’” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 9).

Other managers were more certain of the signals they were receiving, and set their expectations accordingly. The Royal Bath Revenue Manager was made redundant on the same day as making the following observation:

“My Director of Revenue was down two or three weeks ago and today there is a financial review in Brighton, which for the first time ... in ten years as a Revenue Manager or in a position like this, that I have told that I’m not needed to attend a financial review. ‘Okay, then read between the lines there’ ... I definitely feel within the next few weeks that I’ll be saying, ‘Goodbye. So long.’” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 11).

These expectations, described by the managers and employees of De Vere, were typically part of a broader organizational story, which had an important role in individuals' responses to change.

#### **6.4.3 Providing Explanations**

The managers and employees of De Vere sometimes offered explanations for their responses to change, which revealed something about how they had made sense of their experience. The need to understand how a particular event related to other circumstances within the organization, or to place a change into a coherent story, appeared strong, as highlighted by a Personal Assistant from Grand Harbour:

“Sometimes change isn’t always for the better is it? But I think the change that’s happened here, I think the reason probably why we’re still getting good GSS [Guest Satisfaction Survey] and everything is people believe in the change that’s happening. It’s not just being changed for the sake of being changed ... I think everyone’s bought into ... the vision for the hotel and the vision for the company really, with regard to *Shine*, is that we want to improve and we want to make things better, unfortunately we have to go through a bit of trauma to be able to get that, but I think everyone is getting on with their jobs and doing it properly because they can see that it’s for the better” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 18).

Another example came during my early interviews when the Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager voiced an explanation for the changes being driven by Chief Executive. This particular point of view was repeated by other interviewees. The Guest Service Manager had been talking to me about the Chief Executive and her direct line manager, the General Manager of Grand Harbour; the interviewee and the two senior managers had joined De Vere from the hotel chain Marriott:

“these are all people now who are in power, but they don’t want to make it [De Vere] into Marriotts, but there are elements of Marriott that would work very well with De Vere, but it’s that whole conflict between an old company and new people coming in with different ideas and they think that we’re just trying to make some kind of Marriott. Well, that’s just not the case, but there are certain standards

that are very, very rigorously controlled to the point of it being a bit extreme, but you can just see if only they did that, what a difference it would make” (Grand Harbour Guest Service Manager, T22: 3).

A Human Resources Assistant at Grand Harbour had a different explanation for the difficulties Heads of Department (HoDs) were facing in adjusting to the new regime:

“They [HoDs] just don’t really seem to have a clue about what they should, and shouldn’t do and, I don’t know whether it’s ... because they’ve not been trained, I think, most of them are, probably, quite arrogant and don’t want to change the way they work” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 13).

At the same time as a making sense of a new Chief Executive, managers and employees had to interpret the *Shine* programme. One Royal Bath Porter had expressed an arguably cynical view, in which he felt that the company was using *Shine* in an unethical way, to get more from employees:

“As I said it is reasonable from the point of view of the company. It’s always best to do that thing. From my point of view I feel pushed. I wouldn’t say it is not ethical. It’s just not quite right” (Royal Bath Porter, T46: 6).

While the Royal Bath Operations Manager did not directly support this, he saw opportunities in the *Shine* workshops beyond their explicit agenda:

“For us there’s a great opportunity to see all the staff in a controlled environment and understand like who the ‘terrorists’ are, who the people we felt weren’t buying into it and so forth and maybe working on those since then to see whoever they are, they aren’t right, which has been good” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T47: 8).

The change in ownership of De Vere and the corresponding shift in the approach of the AHG Directors was a frequent topic for interviewees seeking an explanation. As a privately owned company, there was much made of the suspected financial aspirations of the AHG Directors. The Royal Bath Operations Manager summarised a feeling of others that monetary gain was the new owners’ only objectives:

“if the right offer comes along. If someone comes along and says, ‘I will give you forty million for the Royal Bath,’ ‘Will you? Fantastic! Send

the cheque then, you can have it.' That's how it works now" (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T57: 8).

This was echoed, with significant concern, by the Room Service Manager at Grand Harbour:

"Are we just in it for big bucks? Is everything big bucks? Because all I see in the paper is that money ends up creating destruction" (Grand Harbour Room Service Manager, T27: 13).

For others, their concern was to make sense of what they perceived as a lack of commercialism in the decisions being taken. As an example, the replacement Royal Bath General Manager, in spite of having been recruited to manage a major refurbishment of the hotel, questioned the financial logic of the scale of investment proposed:

"We do not need all these high bloody numbers which has given me very difficult to return on investment. This could be the people who made this property; local community wanted it to work. You do not need to spend absolute fortunes on this place ... It is quite frustrating" (Royal Bath General Manager, T64: 13).

For a Food Controller, it was a far simpler commercial equation causing concern:

"as lovely as [it is] we are going to improve the food, but either our profits are going to come down or we are going to have to increase prices to increase revenue" (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 9).

While there was concern about the decisions being taken, the Grand Harbour Revenue Manager did credit the new AHG leadership team with the appropriate experience:

"for me personally, some of the decisions they have made, I do not personally agree with, others I really agree with but then I am not a successful businessman with my own millions and my own business" (Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, T38: 9).

The reduction in consultation and involvement in decision making on the transfer from De Vere to AHG was attributed a rational explanation by a number of interviewees. For example, for the Human Resources Manager her

feelings of not being valued, in the new regime, were tempered with the hope that, from her perspective, the lack of involvement was as a consequence of a lack of organization during the transition of ownership:

“That’s being tough, it’s being an entrepreneurial business, and that’s being arrogant, and they do very different things as far as I’m concerned. So I’m hoping it’s just a fact that they’re not particularly organized at this moment in time. It’s just not being involved and not, perhaps, feeling as valued, really” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 2).

In contrast, the Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor used her understanding of the importance to AHG of a focus on customers to justify not considering employees needs:

“I think with that particular change ... the staff were not considered in it. It was predominately what the guest wanted and the staff have ... all been restructured so there was a plan for the staff to kind of adapt to it all, but I think it was all predominately driven by what the customer wanted” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 32).

Having a reason helped some to accept changes, even if they did not like or agree with them. The introduction of a Food and Beverage Director was used as an example by a Personal Assistant at Grand Harbour:

“I see some logic behind it because they’re going to have a head person that’s going to coordinate it all and look at the food [and] beverage offering. So, although, it’s not nice, you can see that what they’re doing it for” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 23).

In some circumstances there appeared no story that could provide the comfort of an explanation. For instance, with the sudden departure of General Manager from Royal Bath: “How can you justify it to someone why [the General Manager] has left, he hadn’t done anything wrong at all” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T57: 10).

One recurring theme from interviewees was to highlight apparent inconsistencies, often between what was being said by AHG Directors, and the actions that managers and employees saw and interpreted. This was particularly evident from managers, who, perhaps, had greater visibility of

issues, or may have required a richer story for sense to be made. For example, the regionalisation of Human Resources, taking away a Human Resources Manager based at each hotel, was interpreted, by the Food Services Manager at Royal Bath, as inconsistent with a call for hotel managers to be interacting with customers:

“you get the Verve Service and they tell you all the managers are to be out of the office at key times and they’re all that, shaking and saying, ‘Hello, fantastic, fantastic’ and then, two days after, they get rid of HR, and so, all the HoDs are all going to sit in their offices even more, doing HR. Actually, that’s a mixed message” (Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 10).

For the Group Reservation Manager at Royal Bath the change in the Human Resources structure was also inconsistent, but for different reasons:

“I don’t actually understand the purposes behind everything really. Obviously, with HR especially, I don’t understand how you can be company focused on employees and take away the HR managers” (Royal Bath Group Reservation Manager, T60: 9).

The theme of a focus on the customer, raised by the Food Services Manager, was also the subject of another apparent inconsistency. The Royal Bath Group Reservation Manager explained:

“And, in my opinion, it’s [central reservations] still awful. I quite often will do test calls and they’re awful. I would never have allowed my girls on the site to sell this hotel like that, so I don’t understand why a company can agree to let all of their hotels be sold like that if they are so customer focused” (Royal Bath Group Reservation Manager, T60: 6).

All these differing examples, of explanations for reactions to organizational changes, demonstrate the importance of fitting new situations into a framework, or story, in order that they can make sense. With *Shine* came a well formed story, or explanation, into which managers and employees were able to relate, or fit, their experiences. Those accepting the ‘official’ story were able to react positively, with the negative comments representing a skeptical view of the story, or the intentions of the storytellers. In contrast, the minimal communications following the AHG takeover left managers and employees alike, looking for explanations and building their own stories to



combat their negative responses to the uncertainty. Perhaps due to their fear of the unknown, these ‘unofficial’ stories often recounted stories of further negative responses. Considering both of these episodes, *Shine* and the AHG takeover, as shifts in the organizational narrative, the influence of the senior management on the stories told was much greater in the case of *Shine*, than the AHG takeover. There were common organizational stories in both cases, which supported individuals in making sense of their experiences, though with the takeover, the narrative was constructed in tandem with feelings of uncertainty and fear, by managers and employees, throughout the organization. In the case of *Shine*, there was a fully constructed explanation by the senior management of De Vere, presenting a positive perspective on the required alterations in behaviour.

## 6.5 CONCLUSIONS

There were many different reactions to the changes that took place at De Vere. While I have categorised these as ‘negative’ or ‘positive’, this interpretation of each of these reactions was not always straightforward, and will have reflected my own biases. Not only were multiple explanations attributed to the same event, but individual responses also varied significantly. What might have been perceived as simple alterations to some, were received by others as fundamental challenges to their identity as managers and employees of De Vere. For some, like the General Manager at Royal Bath, the takeover of AHG had altered their sense of the organization: “do I want to work with this company? I liked De Vere, but this is not the De Vere I joined” (Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 13). Involvement with *Shine* enabled some employees to connect with their colleagues at other hotels, giving them a sense of belonging to a larger organization, an outcome that was never intended during the design of the programme:

“[*Shine*] sort of brings everyone together in a way because you’ve also got a common thing ... ‘cause when I went to the Grand Harbour I was sort of speaking to them about the *Shine* and what they were doing” (Royal Bath Human Resources Assistant, T51: 16).

There was a wide variation in the reactions to organizational changes expressed by the managers and employees of De Vere. In turn these responses were retold by their colleagues in an equally diverse range of interpretations, to the extent that distinctions between negative and positive reactions, or between resistance to change and the engagement with it, were hard to draw in constructing this chapter. Considering these organizational changes as shifts in the common narratives about De Vere has demonstrated the influence the 'official' story, a product of the senior management, can play in shaping responses to change, and how those responses in turn shape the ongoing story, and thereby organizational change.



## **7. STORIES ABOUT CHANGES IN POWER, CONTROL AND AUTONOMY**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Throughout my interviews, De Vere managers and employees referred, either explicitly or implicitly, to a tension during change between giving or taking autonomy, and taking or giving away control. Rather than simply seeing one as the opposite of the other, for example that managers taking control meant less autonomy for employees, interviewees talked about the simultaneous presence of both. Autonomy and control were described as forces or pressures in competition with each other, in a way similar to the competing values identified by Cameron and Quinn (1988) in exploring paradox and transformation. These competing forces were referred to by all hierarchical levels from Chief Executive to hotel porter and, for many interviewees, were related to issues of power – especially what decisions were taken by which people. The balance of these pressures and responsibility for specific decisions was of particular importance for De Vere Group as their espoused strategy was designed to increase levels of customer satisfaction, driven by autonomous employees ‘creating special experiences’. De Vere Group senior managers believed this would be best achieved through individual responsibility, not prescription, so had encouraged increased autonomy for their employees.

Simultaneously, De Vere Group, along with the whole hotel sector, was facing increased cost pressures. This had led to the centralisation or regionalisation of certain services (for example, Reservations and Human Resources support), and increased pressure on hotel General Managers to be accountable for the delivery of financial performance. Both the centralisation and increased managerial accountability had placed emphasis on central and managerial control, in contradiction with policies designed to raise levels of employee autonomy. These competing forces have parallels with the dimension ‘stability and control versus flexibility’, one of the underlying dimensions identified by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) in examining paradoxes of organizational performance. The way interviewees across De Vere made

sense of the potential contradictions and tensions implied by competing pressures of autonomy and control are explored in the first section of the chapter (7.2).

The competing forces, of autonomy and control, were particularly evident in the relationships between constituencies in the organization, or in the way in which one group saw another. Three frequently referenced organizational relationships are used as points of focus to further explore autonomy and control in the next three sections: the relationship between Central Office and the Hotels in section 7.3; the relationship between the acquiring company, AHG and De Vere Group in section 7.4; and finally in section 7.5 the relationship between Managers and Employees. This penultimate section also presents how the Chief Executive and the Grand Harbour General Manager were seen by others to manage, hold or resolve the tensions between autonomy and control. The chapter concludes with a short summary section (7.6).

## **7.2 MAKING SENSE OF POWER, CONTROL AND AUTONOMY**

### **7.2.1 Senior Leadership Behaviour**

The senior management of De Vere Group had explicit policies to devolve power and responsibility for serving their customers, to the lowest possible level of the hierarchy, in order to deliver on a strategy of improved customer service. There was evidence from the interviews that this was having the desired impact:

“complaint letters have gone down, the GSS [Guest Satisfaction Survey] scores have gone up, people are being a little bit more accountable in dealing with things here and now instead of fobbing it off” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 4).

In addition, the benefits to the individual employee of passing responsibility down the organization were captured eloquently by the Food Controller from Royal Bath:

“basically being trusted and ... being left to get on with it, makes me feel that am doing a good job and makes me proud about the job that am doing because I am less being dictated to, more freedom, allowing me to do what I want. So more responsibility given to me is a big change that has affected me and it has made me work harder and delve deeper into things, you know, take it on as my responsibility more” (Royal Bath Food Controller, T48: 3).

However, De Vere Group senior managers recognised that as individuals they could be driven to exercise control, or to be perceived to do so, in contradiction to their espoused policies. The Group Human Resources Director expected more visible initiative to be shown by employees, as a measure of the effectiveness of the policies:

“I don't know if it as an Exec. Team we make it tough for people, but I don't get a lot of people coming to me and saying, ‘I want to do this, will you support me’” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T5: 6).

The Group Marketing Director reflected on his own desire to see results of his actions, a potential motivation to take more personal control, and allow less autonomy:

“You know you walk into a hotel and there are times when you think ‘God! Is this hotel really different from what it was two years ago, as a result of what I’ve spent my ... 12 hours a day doing for the last two years?’ And ... sometimes you have days when you think I’m not sure it is really and that is terrible frustration” (De Vere Group marketing Director, T8: 19).

The De Vere Group Chief Executive recognised that his character may inadvertently lead him to exercise control, while giving the appearance of discussing decisions, and encouraging others to take responsibility:

“I tend to argue quite strongly that my opinions ... are the right opinion. Whilst I would say ... I don’t force my views on to other people ... I’m a consultative leader and all that, there’s a fine line between telling somebody to do it and arguing so forcefully that they end up doing it anyway” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 9).

Others on the Chief Executive's Senior Team believed De Vere management, and their ambition, to be a driving force for change:

“we’re ambitious people. We want to see things better, we’re never satisfied with how things are and consequently you end up in a business that is constantly in some kind of state of turbulence” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 15).

The Chief Executive’s style, and its impact on change, was often referred to during the interviews, and the implications of how he dealt with the potentially competing pressures of giving autonomy and taking control are explored in more detail in section 7.5.5. The De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager, in considering the possibility that while the Chief Executive was leading a strategy that placed emphasis on policies that promoted autonomy, said that he was still at the centre of decision making, and reflected:

“my heart says, ‘oh yes, everybody is absolutely empowered and engaged to make this change’ when actually what we do is perpetuate an opinion that that’s not the case. It’s everyone can make the change once [the Chief Executive] says its okay” (De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager, T9: 13).

The Chief Executive described his own reconciliation of the tension between maintaining a level of control and allowing the necessary flexibility of behaviour, to meet individual customer demands:

“ultimately every leader is going to be different to every other leader ... you’re not going to get carbon copy leaders especially in a distributed retail like environment where your people are your products .... It’s not a tin of beans coming off the production line. It’s a very personal interaction that by its nature is unique ... in every customer situation and therefore you’ve got to find - in the same way as through the strategies - sort of themes that people can adopt in ways that they go about achieving the vision” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 6).

In designing *Shine*, the senior managers had decided to use a set of corporate values to provide these ‘themes’ to guide behaviour and they deliberately avoided prescribing the customer interaction more closely. The Organization Development Manager remembered the discussion on this subject:

“we’ve had this debate many times, you know, are we the sort of business that kind of says these are our values, these are our touch points, there’s your north star, we trust you to operate within this very

loose sort of framework or are we this sort of business that needs standard operating procedures?” (De Vere Group Organization Development Manager, T6: 3).

Other Central Office managers remarked on how this ‘loose sort of framework’ was insufficient, and identified more formal processes as a way of imposing more control initially, before allowing an increase in autonomy to follow:

“I think the kind of paradox is that we are actually also trying to implement processes behind to underpin it [allowing individual autonomy]. So, we have almost gone full circle. We have kind of took the lid off and said we are not a process driven organization, but actually to be that kind of animal you need the process to kind of deviate from. So, in terms of processes, I think it’s kind of a bit of a kind of cycle we need to go through” (De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager, T9: 2).

For some employees, it was the personal messages from the senior managers that were most critical: “it’s great to see the leaders of the business standing in front of everybody and giving them that kind of direction” (De Vere Group Learning and Development Partner, T1: 3).

### **7.2.2 Middle Management Behaviour**

As well as impacting their own behaviour, the senior managers recognised that their espoused strategy of increasing autonomy required a shift in the way managers throughout De Vere interacted with their employees. Middle managers recognised they were an important group:

“I think it’s up to people like me at my level, because we’re middle of the road, aren’t we? We’re shop floor and a little bit higher, we have to bridge that gap, and I think it’s up to our level, HOD level to keep pushing it. We’ve got to. If we give up, we’re never going to get anywhere” (Grand Harbour Room Service Manager, T15: 9).

Some interviewees identified a management approach that emphasised the importance of employees being able to discuss things with their managers, rather than simply receive more direction, was important to encourage autonomy:

“you should feel relaxed in talking to your manager. Yes, you have to respect the fact that they’re your manager, but you need to be relaxed,



they need to be approachable” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 10).

For some, the distinction between the roles of managers and employees, in respect of who had the power to decide on a course of action, was diminishing: “power and the influence now comes from a lot more working together to achieve the goal rather than I am, and so therefore you will, or you must” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 8). However, in looking more closely at the interview transcripts, it was clear that increasing the autonomy of employees required more than managers to simply relinquish control. Increasing autonomy required managers also to act in a different way, in this example, in a style promoted by the General Manager:

“[Employees] feel that they can come to you for advice because you’re not belittling their achievement and you’re encouraging them, but you say, ‘you could just do this’ or ‘have you tried this’, and you just say, ‘all right if you do that’ and they develop and agree with you. And he [my General Manager] taught me that and he uses that principle still now. With everybody you get that chance because it’s very easy to find a negative, it’s much, much harder to find positives because we could all criticize something” (Grand Harbour Guest Services Manager, T22: 19).

The consequences of adopting a leadership approach based on leaders asking questions, rather than providing answers, were picked up upon by the General Manager of one of the hotels:

“if I was to say, ‘well the General Manager doesn’t tell us what to do; the General Manager is asking us what is best to do’. So therefore, there is some sort of confidence on how we’re doing business” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T17: 4-5).

This General Manager recognised that there could be problems with the excessive use of this approach:

“the team members are more confident and know how to operate with a little bit less on leadership, although ... if you leave that gap too long without leadership, there could be a morale decrease” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T17: 5-6).

The General Manager at Royal Bath highlighted that there could be a strong expectation that a leader’s opinions were more than just an idea or possibility,

but a decision to be implemented, as he phrased it: “I have to be acutely aware that if I say something, it goes - without me even meaning it!” (Royal Bath General Manager, T43: 15). The emphasis on the importance of hierarchical position driving what gets done was further emphasised by the Front of House Manager at Royal Bath, referring to the implementation of *Shine*:

“I’m sure they see it as important purely because it’s driven by the General Managers and if the General Managers weren’t getting it from Head Office then they wouldn’t drive it quite as hard as what they do” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T45: 8).

The Group Human Resources Director, in commenting on the distribution of power or control during change, some saw the organizational hierarchy as a dominant feature: “[who has power] is definitely a hierarchical thing” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T5: 4).

### **7.2.3 Political Behaviour**

It might be expected that issues of power, autonomy and control, would promote visible political behaviour in De Vere. Some interviewees saw politics: “at play all the time” (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 15); however, others did not see the organization as political and found the idea of political behaviour difficult to recognise and understand:

“No, I don’t think so [that the organization is political]. I don’t know. I’ve never really thought about it. [Laughter] I don’t think so. I don’t know. [Laughter] In what respect?” (Royal Bath Human Resources Assistant, T51: 22).

Amongst those who did accept the presence of politics, there was a belief that the behaviour was in decline:

“I think there used to be an element of back stabbing, there used to be an element of bitchiness, but I think a lot of those people, negative people, have moved on” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 11);

“I think it [politics] means people have agendas that are not declared. It means that you kind of marginalise people because they don’t agree with your point of view. I don’t think that’s right. I think people increasingly here say what they think” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 19).

There was a perception that political behaviour was restricted to the office staff, who were without the pressures of customer contact:

“The people who are involved in politics are ‘back of house’. It’s not affecting the front of house because they’re pressured enough to get on and do their job. It is just the bickering that you’ve got, it’s people, you know, and I don’t necessarily see it front of house and I don’t see it impacting people, the guests, as such” (Grand Harbour Guest Services Manager, T22: 2).

One Reservations Supervisor supported the apparent reduction in self-interested behaviour, though qualified this with the recognition that her own perception of the organization may have been the cause:

“I think everything sort of got a lot more relaxed. I remember when I first started it was just so regimental and it was sort of so ... strict really. And I don’t know whether that was because I was nineteen, it was my first real job, that was kind of my interpretation of how I felt things were. But everything a lot more relaxed - a lot more friendly. It’s all sort of team working now, rather than sort of trying to tread on as many people as you can to get to the top, which is what it sort of felt like’ (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 2).

#### **7.2.4 Trust and Management Accessibility**

Trust was cited by many as an important ingredient in the successful use of power, to bring about change. It was also described as a factor that allowed the balance between the amount of control exercised and autonomy given, to be made sense of, by the members of De Vere. From a senior management perspective: “if you have got trust [that] the leader or the leadership is taking the right direction, you don’t waste a lot of energy trying to say why not” (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 17). For employees, trust allowed for openness in the relationship with their managers:

“I think, the trust is there, whereas before, I thought, I couldn’t go to management, because of the gossip and stuff, whereas now, if I say anything to [my boss], any HoD [Head of Department], or if I speak to [the General Manager], I know they’ll trust me. They’ll know that I’m not going to lie” (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T32: 17).

While a Sales Coordinator at Grand Harbour identified how the absence of trust can bring discomfort and paranoia:

“occasionally I think there’s a bit of... tension is not the right word, a bit of lack of trust maybe that we’re doing the right thing. I think sometimes it is quite hierarchical, we have to be careful what we do because you have to think there’s people watching you all the time” (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T14: 9-10).

Many interviewees described a significant change in the level of trust following the change in ownership of De Vere Group. The lack of trust placed on the General Managers by the acquiring company, AHG, was seen by the Grand Harbour General Manager as an explanation for his lack of involvement in decision making:

“I would envision that, hopefully, these changes are finished and we’re going to gain their trust, and we’re going to be involved in the future changes that we need to do. Unfortunately, it’s not the case at the moment; therefore, my responsibility is to do what they decide to do, if it’s non-negotiable. I have to make sure that, ultimately, our guests and our people do not suffer” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 4).

Trust was seen as an important ingredient in allowing the Grand Harbour General Manager to exert power effectively, and to balance autonomy and control in his approach with his team:

“He [the General Manager] is very open and honest. In the Exec. Team, we work on an open forum, so everybody will have their own opinion. If you do not agree with him or somebody else, then that is fine, but then there is a discussion around how that is going to be solved as opposed to just yes or no. I think again, he is very much like that with the heads of department. He just got this knack of... you know that he is always there and he is very supportive, but on the same level, he makes you feel like there is a reason why you are in that job, because he trusts you for it. I think it is trust and support” (Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, T38: 6).

The General Manager at Royal Bath also used trust to good effect:

“he [the General Manager] seems to put a lot more trust in my ability and expects that I have a great deal of knowledge ... and he tells me a lot more of what’s going on and I think that’s the best thing” (Royal Bath Maintenance Manager, T49: 4).

As well as putting trust in others, the Royal Bath General Manager made himself accessible to his employees:

“he [the General Manager] has led the way, so to speak and he is, with the staff, he is more communicative. He is out there. He is with us. You feel like he is one of us, not just someone shut in office who makes the big decisions, which is good because GMs can be scary” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 11).

The visibility and availability of management was an important factor at Grand Harbour too:

“he [the General Manager] put this new thing in that the Executive Team now actually do ‘executive weekends’ ... [What] can always be a bit of a bug in hotels, is you get your senior management to mainly work nine to five, Monday to Friday or even into the evenings, but not very much on the weekends, and they’re the ones dictating everything and all of a sudden they go home on Friday and we’re left to do all the work. That’s the way sometimes it’s perceived. But he [the General Manager] put this thing in where they do a senior management shift every four, five weekends” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 14);

“The housekeeping office is on the third floor, so away from the rest of the operation and I went up on a Saturday afternoon and into the office and the supervisors in there said, ‘what are you doing here?’ I said ‘well, I’m the Operations Manager and the biggest part of the operations that’s going to start Sunday so why shouldn’t I be here?’ ‘Oh well, it’s just in the past you know, you’d never see anybody.’ ‘You’re going to see a lot of me’” (Grand Harbour Operations Manager, T20: 5).

Trust and accessibility were two concepts that employees described helped them to accept the legitimacy of managers to make decisions, and guide their work:

“Oh, I didn’t even imagine how this [the current changes] worked. I have hoped my Executive Team are involved with all the movement and changes that are made out throughout the hotel. Head Office obviously as well” (Grand Harbour Payroll Coordinator, T12: 7).

For some, though, management decisions were still accepted grudgingly: “People make these decisions, and we have to go along with them” (Grand Harbour Telephonist, T24: 3).

### 7.2.5 Changes in Control and Autonomy following the AHG Takeover

Employees at all hierarchical levels in De Vere Group expressed a desire for autonomy in their work. At Royal Bath, the newly appointed General Manager was expecting to be given personal autonomy to run the hotel:

“There obviously are the corporate pressures, but they are not here every single day, which is marvelous. Much [of De Vere] is based up north so, from that point of view, we get a free rein” (Royal Bath General Manager, T64: 4).

However, after the AHG takeover, one of the new General Manager’s team recognised that his hope for personal freedom was not being fulfilled:

“When he came in, he put a whole lot of small changes in, which were very good, but I think what has happened is, they [AHG] have pulled the reins in because we have been told that there is a target that we have to reach. It has tied his hands ... and they are now cutting all the staff and everything; he has to go with it” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T65: 3).

Compared to De Vere Group’s policies to increase autonomy, the shift to a more controlling leadership style and the more direct use of power by AHG following their takeover, was subject matter for sensemaking at both Grand Harbour and Royal Bath. Many saw an increase in autonomy and in control. The Food Controller at Royal Bath used the passing of time to account for a shift in style:

“the initial reaction, mainly from the management here, was they [AHG] let each hotel look after themselves. Their main priority is essentially profit and as long as you’re running the hotel well and making profit, they are happy. That’s a very, very basic way of how AHG works. Although it does seem, more recently, that they are taking a lot more interest in their role in how each hotel is run” (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 3).

A Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor drew on the backgrounds of the AHG directors to explain their actions:

“the AHG directors, I think there’s eight, ... are businessmen and they’ve got a lot of money ... they want to invest and they are quite happy to spend their money, but they are relying on people telling them how to. They are not hoteliers. They are not restaurateurs. They are entrepreneurs. So, they are having to rely on people advising them.

And I think they obviously get no advice and they go off and they do it. And then these men come into the picture and go, 'Well, we don't like that'. So, I think it's kind of almost they empower people to do things and then every now and then they want to interfere and that's when things are highlighted" (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T60: 21).

The number of AHG Directors was frequently cited:

"All I know is that there's ten or twelve of them. We have not been told much that about them, as of yet. Just basically that they bought the company and that they've got some new ideas ... they changed the colour and we've got ... we've been put into three different categories like Heritage, so, we've got different colours for each one" (Grand Harbour Conference Co-ordinator, T31:10).

Whereas for one Human Resources Assistant it was the AHG Director's motivation that provided a justification to give full support: "they're just passionate to move the business forward, I suppose. So, you want to give them all your help and support to stay along with them" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 15). The impact of this shift in the balance of power with the takeover by AHG is explored in more detail in section 7.4. The speed of decision making was often raised by interviewees:

"very quick when they decide, when they decided that something needs to be done or people need to go or people need to be hired. It seems to be very quick that they do it" (Royal Bath Maintenance Manager, T63: 1).

This speed was not always accompanied by a perceived quality of decision making:

"They really make stupid decisions. They do not look at things like as a bigger picture sometimes" (Grand Harbour Food and Beverage Controller, T42: 7);

"We have fantastic linen within the bedrooms, which is great, but it has doubled our linen costs within the last six months. I think if I was running [the hotel] I would rather focus that money on other areas, get those things done as a business" (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T66: 3).

The parallel between autonomy and control, and the competing values framework developed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983), was noted in the introduction to this chapter. Quinn emphasised:

“The model does not suggest that these oppositions cannot mutually exist in a real system. It suggests, rather, that these criteria, values and assumptions are oppositions in our minds. We tend to think that they are very different from one another, and we sometimes assume them to be mutually exclusive” (Quinn, 1988: 49-50).

This section has demonstrated that changes in the application of power, to both give autonomy and take control, were identified concurrently by organization members during change at De Vere Group. Autonomy and control relate to the location of power in the organization, and the nature of the relationship between parts of the organization or individual members. The next sections present the ways in which particular relationships in De Vere Group were described in the interviews, in order to further explore how sense was made of the competing forces of autonomy and control.

### **7.3 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CENTRAL OFFICE AND THE HOTELS**

The tensions for managers, in giving autonomy to others and exercising control themselves, were evident in the stories told by interviewees of the relationship between De Vere Group Central office and the hotels. Different perceptions of this relationship were described by members of the organization, and there was a noticeable shift in relationship during the course of my research. The De Vere Group Marketing Director, described a time when the centre used its power to follow its own agenda and intervene directly in hotel operations:

“there was a lot of disconnection between centre and the unit previously... the impression you get was that there was a lot of work going on in the centre that the units didn’t really value. Now having said that, the other kind of dynamic that was going on was that the centre had kind of ended up doing a lot for the units, so if we had a problem in our hotel, literally people would go and manage the hotel... and there was a palpable kind of tension and mistrust, I think, between the centre of the business and the units” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 4).



This 'disconnection' between Central Office and the hotels was acknowledged by interviewees based in the hotels. They also commented on a change in the level of involvement of Central Office: "I used to think that central office was apart from us and I think they are more involved now with us than what they were before" (Grand Harbour Payroll Coordinator, T12: 2). The recognition by the senior management of De Vere Group that "a hotel [is] where the actual influence and power sits" (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 15), had led the Executive Team to set out to change the purpose of Central Office, and to shift some decision making powers to lower hierarchical levels:

"There isn't any money made in here [at Central Office] and the money is made in the units and the role of the centre is to facilitate the units making money and to provide strategic leadership functionally and to ensure that everything that we're doing is adding value where it matters, which is actually in the hotels" (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 4).

A change in the style of working relationships with Central Office was described by interviewees based in the hotels. Often they referred to more of an equal or peer relationship, in contrast to being on the receiving end of a controlling leadership style:

"I didn't have that much contact and head office for me was, 'Oh, crikey, Head Office!' It was a big thing. And now... we are having a laugh and a chat and we are still professional... we're on the same level" (Grand Harbour Payroll Coordinator, T12: 2).

Less control from head office was described as being accompanied by a more informal working approach, in which there was an increased visibility of De Vere Group senior management:

"guys like [the Chief Executive] and [the Operations Director], they will come down and we get to know who they are, whereas before it was like the guys from head office, well who are they?" (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 5).

*Shine* was cited as having played a role in promoting this accessibility, through giving hotel management more sustained contact with the senior managers, and consequently:

“I saw people like [the Operations Director] completely differently than I’d seen him before [*Shine*]. I saw a real synergy between Central and Property, I think it really developed those relationships” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T12: 5).

The exposure to senior individuals was reinforced by the Operations Director’s own leadership of the hotel General Managers. The Grand Harbour General Manager described his line manager as follows:

“He was a manager that was very people-centered; he believed, he understood, he knew what we were trying to achieve. He was behind me all the time and that gave us the time scale... we needed to change the business. To change the business, that takes time; to change the culture, it takes a hell of a lot of time” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 10)

This level of involvement by the Central Office senior managers had consequences for them as individuals, particularly during the uncertain times prior to takeover of De Vere Group by AHG: “One of the defining moments was when he [the Operations Director] broke down when we were doing one of the sessions in a GM meeting because he wasn’t sure then, after his hard work of two years building up his team, whether he would be there to lead them” (Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 12).

The relationships between people in the hotels and in Central Office were not restricted to the General Managers. Functional specialists (Revenue Management, Human Resources, Marketing and Finance) in Central Office had been formed into ‘Brand Support Teams’ shortly after the appointment of a new Chief Executive in 2003. They were a source of individual support for their counterparts in the hotels. The Grand Harbour Revenue Manager commended her Central Office manager: “she has a massive influence on me because she is the one who helped me grow” (Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, T38: 12). Nevertheless, for many in the hotels their local manager

maintained a critical role. One Reservations Supervisor underlined the complexity of the relationship when she explained:

“You’re kind of aware that it is De Vere, and everything that you do is kind of controlled by Central Office, but at the same time, I would see sort of [the General Manager] and the hotel as being my employer or my boss” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 5).

There was no escaping the more ‘traditional’ consequences of a ‘visit from head office’: “it’s always an honour like that when the big boss is coming. So we do the cleaning” (Royal Bath Porter, T46: 12).

In contrast to the more open management style and support from head office, De Vere Group was also increasing the number of services it managed centrally. The reservations teams for the Village Hotels and Health Clubs had been removed from the hotels, to a single centrally managed team during 2005. This approach was then replicated for De Vere Hotels, to the surprise of many in the hotels:

““Oh, we’d never centralise De Vere [Reservations] because you’ve got too many bedroom products, etc.’ But they did it. I’m not a hundred percent convinced yet that it’s working to its full potential. I think having people on the site who know the product and who know exactly every bedroom and every intimate detail of the bedroom, they know the town, they know the area, they know what the guest is coming to, is a far better service to offer our customers rather than somebody who is based in another area who doesn’t know a thing about the town” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 5).

The takeover by AHG accelerated this process of centralisation, and marked a noticeable change in the balance between autonomy and control in the hotels. Some interviewees experienced an increase in autonomy:

“the support has been completely cut off because I used it quite liberally in the past, anyway. I think it’s just the communication which I’ve missed greatly. And very, very small things, it’s a new person in the Central Office team. ‘Hello, who are you? Or have you just started? Where are you from, what do you do?’ Just small things like that that you’d like to feel involved because it makes you feel engaged and part of the business” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T12: 2).

Other employees described an increase in central control by AHG:

“[central control is] probably more so now than it ever used to be, with the branding and the marketing, it’s all so central now, whereas before you were all individual units and you were very much left to your own devices” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 22).

However, the hotel managers were not all ready to give up control to head office easily: “It’s going to be led locally [the refurbishment] and if we’re told [by head office], they’ll be disappointed” (Royal Bath General Manager, T55: 10). The impact of the change in ownership on power, control and autonomy is explored further in the next section.

#### **7.4 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN AHG AND DE VERE GROUP**

The takeover of De Vere Group by AHG brought with it a change in the way in which power was used by Central Office. There were contrasting experiences. Some interviewees described an emphasis on increased autonomy, with General Managers given more freedom in the daily running of their hotels, as long as they met their financial targets. At the same time there were stories of significant operational decisions taken centrally by AHG, without apparent involvement of the hotel management. These changes in the use of power were experienced as contradictory within the hotels:

“the first message that came out was it was going to be less, so it was going to be more independent to run the way which we’re thinking ourselves what is going to work best. But the more I see lately, it does seem to be they are dictating a bit more” (Royal Bath Food Controller, T58: 10).

It was this ‘dictating’ that was a major focus for many interviewees:

“So, it’s a little bit more controlling, because you have no say. We can’t go back to head office, and say, ‘We don’t think that’s a good idea, so we’re going to do something different down here’ ... before you could have, maybe, slightly, got away with that, whereas now you can’t; you have to do their way and that’s it. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I don’t know because from my point of view it’s their money, isn’t it?” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 24);

“There was probably [a] little bit more open discussion before things were decided, certainly, probably between GMs and Central Office,

whereas sort of now, I just think that they just get an email saying this is happening and to kind of deal with it” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T60: 27).

This increase in central decision making was accompanied by concerns over the quality and frequency of communication: “now the communication from Central is just minimal. There really is no communication from Central” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 16). It was into this environment that the new Royal Bath General Manager arrived early in 2006 and the situation drew sympathy from his deputy:

“It’s just the way they do things – communication, again, is just a nightmare; it really is a nightmare and poor old [guy] doesn’t know what’s going to happen next. He didn’t know that Food and Beverage Directors are being appointed, he didn’t know that HR has been restructured, he didn’t know that the Revenue Manager was being made redundant and restructured; the integral parts of the business – he didn’t know any of that. So, I wonder what he’s thinking – can’t be nice, to be honest” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T47: 12).

The experience of a lack of involvement in, and short notice of, these operational decisions was echoed at Grand Harbour, as the General Manager recalled:

““This is what’s happening, next week, all your chefs will be called in to a meeting saying that their role doesn’t exist anymore. We’re going to create a Food and Beverage Director role, and they’re going to have the opportunity to apply; and if they don’t, obviously, they’re going to lose their positions”” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 3).

This situation was repeated with the restructuring of Human Resources:

“He [the General Manager] doesn’t know anything that’s happening until the day it happens. He didn’t know anything about what was happening to HR. They called a meeting at two o’clock in Northampton and they had a conference call at eleven o’clock with the GMs, so they told the GMs what they were doing in the same day. That’s pretty poor, really” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 15).

The impact on the Grand Harbour General Manager, he said, was significant and he was coping with the lack of empowerment by attributing it to a temporary transitional time:

“I hope that, and I’m sure once the company shapes up, they will empower, once again, the General Manager to be in this role. Because, in all fairness, that’s what I enjoy doing” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 9).

The perceived loss of autonomy, and the perceived threat to his position if his hotel did not perform, was quite profound for the General Manager, and had a noticeable impact on his wellbeing.

### **Vignette 7.1 – Not his usual self**

It was my third interview with the General Manager at Grand Harbour and while he was still immaculately turned out, there was something different about him. A few extra pounds, perhaps? The cloth of that smart double breasted suit was stretching a little too much in places. He looked pale and had a distracted air about him. He was clearly under a level of pressure and stress. It didn’t take Marco long to explain. Since the AHG takeover the General Manager had seen many of his fellow General Managers depart, not through their own choice and he was fearful for his own job, especially as it was hard to see a pattern of which General Managers were staying and which were going. He recalled a time in the summer: “I sat down in the office and locked my office and I said hold on a second. I have to make a decision why I am not enjoying it [working at Grand Harbour]. The reason I was not enjoying it is that that I was worried about if that happened to me [being fired] who is going to pay the mortgage and school fees for my children. My biggest worry was the finance. I made a decision and called my financial adviser. I said can we look at my insurances, can we look at my budget and my mortgage. That was the best decision I made last year, was to go and see him” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T39: 5). With his personal situation more secure the Grand Harbour General Manager was able to resume his positive front, though it appeared to me, at some cost.

Another way in which AHG was perceived by interviewees, to have increased the level of central control after the takeover, was through faster decision making:

“with the PLC Company ... it could take them ten months, eleven months, to come to a decision of what they were going to do, but with this company, he could get up one morning, and just decide that it was

all going to change, again. And, he would have every right to do that, because that's his money, and it's his business" (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 24-25).

There were many stories of quick decisions: "apparently they have a meeting every Monday afternoon to discuss things and then sort of like action by Tuesday type of thing" (Royal Bath Human Resources Administrator, T62: 12). Though moving at this speed was not without its difficulties, as the Grand Harbour General Manager recounted:

"the involvement is less because there is a lot more uncertainty, communication is falling behind, they're under pressure to change, and they want to go very quickly, although, when you're an entrepreneur and you decide to do something, and then you have to put up forty hotels, forty teams, it takes time to do that" (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 1).

The focus on a small group of owners, able and willing to take decisions, was seen as an organizational strength by some interviewees:

"it's just eight people, isn't it? I think, just eight guys [own AHG]. I think that's why they're so determined, because it's obviously their money. I think it's better in a way because that's your money and you have to make to sure the right thing has been done with it. Whereas with De Vere, it was the shareholders that were losing money and the shareholders weren't having any influence in the running of the business. The people that were running it didn't really care probably. They were still getting paid the same" (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 11).

While decisions were made quickly, the decision making process was not transparent to many interviewees:

"Well, it is all a bit mysterious I think, if that is the only way that I can describe it. You never quite know who you are dealing with, who deals with what, and you hear nothing for weeks. And then all of a sudden, something will arrive and you got no idea what to do with it" (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T36: 2).

The Royal Bath General Manager, after his departure, was less generous in his description of the AHG Directors: "they weren't Directors, they were hatchet men and that's the doubt. You never really knew who was in charge" (Royal

Bath Former General Manager, T53: 12). This sentiment was echoed by his counterpart at Grand Harbour: “The feedback I get [about AHG] is, the word that comes across all the time, lack of caring. They don’t care” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 18). The inconsistencies between AHG taking control, through increased centralised decision making, and simultaneously giving more implicit autonomy, by being less involved in daily operations, was a source of confusion as managers and employees sought to make sense of the new working relationships. The Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager wrestled for an explanation for her experiences of AHG:

“I’m finding it hard to understand if it is arrogance or if it is just a lack of organization, not perhaps, enough people in the business at the moment” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 11).

The General Manager at Royal Bath had more direct experience to aid his sensemaking:

“He [an AHG Director] said, if somebody’s not performing, just get rid of them and we’ll see them in court. And I just thought, I don’t know if I really want to work with this” (Royal Bath Former General Manager, T53: 2).

It was his replacement, as General Manager, who drew attention to something else accentuating his sense of a lack of autonomy under AHG:

“if you ask the staff or the staff asks you what does [De Vere] Deluxe mean? They probably would not give you an answer. I do not know really. Are they really part of anything? What is our goal? What is our statement? What are we looking to do? What drives us? I think that is a big question mark hanging on over everybody” (Royal Bath General Manager, T64: 8).

Without a guiding framework, people said that it was difficult to feel free to act, especially in an environment where the business’s owners appeared willing to take the major decisions, and were unforgiving of mistakes:

“They give you a warning, if you don’t take it, then you’re out. I think once they give you that warning, there’s no way of pulling back. Like they say, buck up your ideas or get out. It’s basically get out. I don’t think there’s any way you’re going to pull yourself once they’ve done that, to be honest” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 11).



The impact of the changing balance between autonomy and control, on the relationship between managers and employees, is explored in the next section.

## **7.5 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES**

### **7.5.1 Changes for General Managers**

The relationship between the hotel managers and their employees is another domain in which changes in power, control and autonomy were evident. The Chief Executive and his team, through programmes such as *Shine*, were attempting to alter the historic stereotype, within De Vere Group, of a hotel General Manager, as an autocratic leader, and to replace it with a leadership approach that allowed employees to act autonomously, and take responsibility for ‘creating special experiences’ for their customers. *Shine* was designed to support employees taking up new found freedoms and accountabilities, as well as encouraging a change in behaviour from General Managers and their Executive Teams. During my interviews, some of the managers in De Vere Group Central Office expressed their belief that General Managers were already given significant freedom to run their hotels. The Human Resources Brand Manager for De Vere Hotels described the consequences of this autonomy, reflecting the challenges it brought across the portfolio of nineteen De Vere Hotels:

“I think what’s quite interesting is that the whole level of autonomy that General Managers in the units have; it’s very, very different from anything that I’ve seen before, which makes change a little bit easier to kind of administer in that they’re given the autonomy to be able to make a difference and to go out there and to do things, but also that compounds with the fact it’s very, very difficult to strike a consistency and to measure things that are happening out in the business with everybody going off with sort of nineteen different ways of doing things” (De Vere Hotels Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 1).

The critical role of the General Managers in driving hotel performance was highlighted by the Operations Director, who was the line manager for the General Managers:

“They [the General Managers] are the pivotal power ... they decide actually what happens; in terms of the customer, in terms of the service, in terms of the recruitment, in terms of the selling price, in terms of the buying price” (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 14).

In practice, one of the areas in which General Managers, and their executive teams, were seen to exercise control was in resolving conflict:

“I think the management team and the executive team step in and resolve ... conflict immediately really” (Grand Harbour Payroll Coordinator, T12: 7);

“So [the Operations Manager] and [the General Manager] will go round and sort it out straight away and Sarah [the HR Manager] as well if there’s an incident” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 12).

The challenges presented by De Vere Group strategy, and its policies, including *Shine*, required a change in the involvement of General Managers in their hotels:

“there is much greater accountability for the GMs that if they want something to be different, they can't just say to somebody, right I want it to be different, and you do it, it will involve some effort and some accountability from their part” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 3).

However, other employees challenged the pivotal role of the General Managers: “In my opinion, I don’t think the GM’s have influence. I think they are the puppets. They are told what to do” (Royal Bath Revenue Manager, T61: 19). If the General Managers were to be influential, their middle managers or Heads of Department were an important link to customer-facing employees.

### **7.5.2 Changes for Heads of Department**

The Grand Harbour and the Royal Bath had organizational structures consistent with the rest of De Vere Group. Reporting to the General Manager was an Operations Manager, often also referred to as the Deputy General Manager, who managed the operational aspects of the hotel through a number of Heads of Department (HODs). *Shine* encouraged employees with

customer contact to show more individual initiative, and also demanded more involvement from the hotel's Executive Team, so:

“the middle managers are kind of getting a more demanding work force to manage and they have got a more demanding boss to manage them and I suspect they just get squeezed in the middle; and that's a very tough place for them to be really” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T5: 7).

The capability of these HODs was questioned by some interviewees: “Most of them [HODs], I don't think, are very good. They don't know how to solve things, or manage people” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant, T26: 13). Other interviewees raised questions on the motivation for the behaviour of some HODs:

“I'd say there has been a kind of core bunch of team leaders and HODs that have actually influenced this business in the past. They've been political game players, they've played about with the business far too long” (Grand Harbour Operations Manager, T20: 10).

Within this group, there were individuals who stood out for their approach to control. For example, the Front Office at Royal Bath was described by one of his team:

“He is the man with the rules. He doesn't bend the rules. If you do something wrong you know that you'll get pulled for that. And that for me is the right man in the right position. There's no bending rules” (Royal Bath Porter, T46: 10).

This Front of House Manager recognised how his controlling approach was received by others, and how dependent he was on his team for success:

“I am very firm, some they say, in other departments, overly firm, but I see myself as fair, and my staff never have a problem. They know if there is a problem, they will know all about it, but when there is no problem, it is how you treat them, and I will do whatever I possibly can to help them out, purely because, if they fail, I fail” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T65: 8).

Also at Royal Bath, the Operations Manager was singled out as adopting an overly involved approach:

“I don’t understand it, because our chef’s very good, he doesn’t need to have somebody to pass plates for him, but [the Operations Manager] likes to be at the hot plate to control everything. And I don’t know if it’s a power thing being along side the chef that can shout and has sharp knives” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 27);

“he’s [the Operations Manager] the guy that’s sticking the nose in everything and I always tell him that we can’t be good at everything ... So let’s say if we have a busy check-out and [he] is helping out... it is messy” (Royal Bath Porter, T46: 11).

### **7.5.3 Changes for Employees**

Giving employees the power to respond to customer requirements was an essential part of *Shine*, and was seen, by some interviewees at Central Office, as part of a deeper respect for the individual:

“we haven’t been prescriptive, it wasn’t a kind of one size fits all and everybody needs to operate in this way, kind of like the way the main competitors do it. It does give them the freedom to bring the personality to work and be themselves at work” (De Vere Group Human Resources Brand Manager, T3: 1).

This individualism was described as being tempered by the requirement for clear direction:

“there is a great clarity about what they have to deliver, you know, what they have to do, and that helps people have greater freedom, because if you set the framework ... then they know that within that space they can move” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 5).

The importance of customer-facing employees, in delivering the hotels’ services, was recognised by many of the managers interviewed:

“if you don’t actually look after these people, and it’s actually these people that you rely on, it’s not these people upstairs in the offices that are relied on, it’s these, and if these people are not happy and are not doing their jobs well and they’ve got a miserable face and are in a bad mood, then that is going to reflect hugely on the guests and they’re going to say, ‘That is a shit place as a work place. People are not very hospitable’” (Guest Services Manager, T22: 5).

The impact on employees of being required to act more autonomously, through their involvement in *Shine*, and the altered approach of some of their

hotel managers was a frequent topic during my interviews. A change in employee behaviour was noted by many interviewees:

“...they are more confident that they don’t need to ask permission from a manager, they can take the initiative to do something” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T30: 8);

“I think people try a bit more, instead of saying no straightaway, we can’t help you, they will try and explore a few more avenues before they give up. Or they’ll ask a colleague to help them, whereas before it was very much a no, we can’t do that” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 12);

“It gives them a bit of responsibility. It’s like, ‘Well, I did this for this guest and it makes them feel good’ and I think generally a lot of people talk about it. ‘Oh, I did this today and it was my shining moment’” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 12).

Employees talked about their motivations for this change:

“I think that my confidence comes from the fact that being recognised ... by the management” (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T32: 8);

“We bend the rules a little bit. I mean, and that is what makes it more fun to work here because it is not straight-laced ... we can make differences all over the place and it is a lot better that way because you can be bored otherwise” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 14).

The shift of power away from Central Office control, to more devolved decision making within the hotels, was described positively by managers, as well as customer facing employees:

“I’m quite happy to take on the extra responsibility. I really want to be a part of the changes, and what’s what happening because, to me, as long as it continues it’s going to be fantastic to be a part of that” (Grand Harbour Sales Manager, T29: 13);

“...since he’s left [the previous General Manager] we’ve got a totally different style which for me is great because it enables me to do even more than what I would have liked to have done in the past. It’s empowering, I can do a lot more things. Which is great for me ... I feel more confident in my role and where I’m going and appreciated ... in the last three months than what I probably have done since I’ve been in the hotel” (Royal Bath Operations Manager, T47: 3);

“...my outlook has changed, purely because of the level of respect and responsibility that they have put towards me” (Royal Bath Front of House Manager, T65: 6).

These comments, from managers and employees, highlight some of the individual benefits of being trusted with more autonomy. Interviewees described how this required Senior Managers to be personally involved to a high degree, as they sought to both empower, and maintain overall control. For one of the General Managers, this level of involvement brought complications:

“Everybody got to know him [the General Manager] probably a little too well, I think. Hence, now everyone’s getting away with more than they should’ve been” (Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 5).

The impact of the shifting pressures, on two senior managers, of exercising power to maintain control and give autonomy are explored in the following two sections.

#### **7.5.4 De Vere Group Chief Executive**

The Chief Executive was described, by other employees, as a powerful leader of De Vere Group, and the improvements in business performance were regularly attributed to him: “the biggest impetus for change has been the recruitment to the new CEO; and that individual as such ... having a completely different outlook on life to lots of people that were here before” (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 1). The Chief Executive embodied the personal tensions between autonomy and control explored in this chapter, being described both as accessible and inspirational to others, and a hard driver of his own ideas and principles. To interviewees with a distant and infrequent relationship with him, he was relaxed and available, in stark contrast to previous Chief Executives. One Reservations Supervisor at Royal Bath described her meeting with the Chief Executive:

“I found [the Chief Executive] very friendly. He sort of came in and introduced himself to everybody and was quite chatty in the office,

certainly quite approachable on that occasion that he came into the hotel” (Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor, T52: 31).

As an introduction to the *Shine* cascade workshops, the Chief Executive recorded a short video, which was seen by every member of staff, and reinforced this ‘laid back’ image:

“He is a little bit tongue in cheek ... after watching the video from *Shine* it makes you think that ... he and we are on the same wavelength ... He is one who has this business to push forward. He is not like a school headmaster sort of thing. He is more laid back ... You are allowed to stand up and make decisions and have new ideas and put it forward, whereas before you could not do that” (Royal Bath Management Trainee, T50: 15).

As this story shows, the Chief Executive’s ‘public’ personal style was seen as consistent with the other messages of *Shine*, encouraging employees to take the initiative and responsibility and to devolve certain decision making powers to customer-facing employees. I helped him in his preparation for recording this video, and I remember meeting him in his office the evening before the shoot.

## **Vignette 7.2 – Preparing for ‘the shoot’**

Being asked to meet with the Chief Executive of De Vere Group was never an entirely comfortable request for me, and I sensed many others. While he was engaging and stimulating to be with, he tackled every subject with a fierce logic. The Chief Executive had an opinion on everything and it seemed he felt compelled, not only to express that opinion, but argue his case to the bitter death. A meeting with him was hand-to-hand mortal combat. These were my reflections as I sat opposite his ever smiling secretary, waiting for my appointment. It was late August 2005 and the first *Shine* kick-off workshops were less than two weeks away. The decision to include an introductory video from the Chief Executive for the cascade workshops had been an addition to our original project scope. He was going to open all the kick-off workshops with the hotel leadership teams and wanted to do the same with the staff. We were up against a near impossible timescale, the film crew were shooting another piece of footage for the launch at a nearby hotel and the Chief Executive had a half hour long slot with them at eight the following morning. He was going to need to be

word perfect first time or else... Well, I wasn't brave enough to contemplate the alternative. The Chief Executive strode past from his previous meeting picking me up in his wake.

What followed was an interaction with the Chief Executive that was out of keeping with all my prior experience of him. It had been a long day, he looked tired and his normally crisp appearance was looking worn at the edges. His head was 'all over the place'; I struggled to help him find a structure for his introduction the following day. Nothing seemed to make sense for him. It was as if the day's pressures had acted as a blender on his brain, jumbling his thoughts into a thick soup of ideas. None of my suggestions hit the mark and after a frustrating hour or so, his secretary's head appeared to inform us his car had arrived to take the Chief Executive to his dinner appointment.

I slept badly. Unusual for me, as switching off is rarely a problem, but my nightmare was a confused Chief Executive, recorded for posterity and broadcast to De Vere masses. I wasn't surprised when at 8.30 the following morning my phone rang and the name of the film director appeared on its screen. "Graham, well done! [The Chief Executive] was fantastic! We did it in one take, he was sharp, clear and totally on message." 'How on earth did he do that?' I wondered and I breathed an enormous sigh of relief.

Interviewees were clear that the Chief Executive was able to inspire others:

"you don't want to let that guy down, which is great in lots and lots of ways. And if he wasn't here tomorrow, it might be a more comfortable place to work, whether it would be a satisfying place to work, I don't know" (De Vere Group Human Resources Director, T4: 2).

They said he used this to leave his mark on particular projects, and the business as a whole: "[The Chief Executive's] leadership is a big influence, is a massive influence on the business. But, I think that's very good ... what I think is *Shine*, is [him], there is no question about it" (De Vere Hotels Operations Director, T10: 17). The Chief Executive was described, by other managers and employees, as maintaining a balanced use of power, though not without



causing some different interpretations of his behaviour, as De Vere Group Marketing Director explained:

“People misunderstand [the Chief Executive] you know. People think that [he] is a micromanager. And people who don’t know him think that he is a bit of a control freak, that everything has to go through him, but people also completely misunderstand his bombacity ... they think he dislikes being disagreed with and nothing could be farther from the truth. You know, [the Chief Executive] delights in being disagreed with. Nothing frustrates [him] more than being surrounded by people who agree with him. It’s just ‘what’s the point?’ ‘Why do I need you lot if all you’re going to do is agree with me?’” (De Vere Group Marketing Director, T8: 21-22).

The Chief Executive’s passion, and involvement, also brought with it frustrations for those around him, as illustrated in the ‘small story’ below. However, for many interviewees, he successfully maintained the contradictions of giving direction and empowering others.

#### **Small Story 7.1 – Working with the De Vere Group Chief Executive**

“I have my own experiences with [the Chief Executive]. You know, if he wants something done a certain way it’s pretty hard work sometimes to say ‘I disagree’ or ‘I think this way is better’ or ‘slow down and help me to understand’. ... I went to meet him with this point of view and we were all set up to do it this way and then [he] changed his mind. ... We’d been working on ‘touch point’ training for couple of months now, six weeks, eight weeks, we’ve had a project team looking at it. We’re kind of 70% there, working it all out. We’ve been talking to [the HR Director] about it. We’ve been talking to [the Marketing Director] about it. Two weeks ago, [the Marketing Director] says ‘well I’ve been talking to [the Chief Executive] and I don’t think this is what he wants.’ So the whole thing goes up in the air again and it comes back down looking completely different and everyone gets into a frenzy because, well, [the Chief Executive] wants it to be job skills training and well we never set out to design job skills training. If somebody told me at the beginning that we wanted job skills training, I could have incorporated it in, I could have done it differently, but that wasn’t what I set out to do. How did we get to the space because [the Marketing Director] was involved in the project? [The Human Resources Director] was involved in the project. Do I need to go to [the Chief Executive] to talk about frontline training?

Surely the Chief Exec's got better things to do, but he has such strong views on these things that you've kind of got to get him on board so I ended up going to the Exec. [Meeting] last week, was there till nine o'clock at night, talking it all through, finding a way through it, and there is a way through it, but it's the reaction that he causes around him. And it's not that people are frightened or they won't stand up to him or you won't have a debate, but it's kind of how do you get enough of his time to get his view and to have a discussion early enough to make sure you're on the right lines.... The difficulty is when it's not contained and then you've got a group of 20 people who're involved in this confusion and you can't contain the discussion until you get to clarity and then move on again. And that's what causes an instability sometimes (De Vere Group Organization Development Manager, T6: 17-18).

#### **7.5.5 Grand Harbour General Manager**

As with the Chief Executive, the behaviour of Grand Harbour General Manager was described, by those I interviewed, as illustrating the tensions caused by providing a balance of autonomy and control. This section describes how those people made sense of the potential contradictions in his use of power. The arrival at Grand Harbour of new General Manager, at the end of 2005, signaled a change in leadership style: "The management, what we have got now, is more hands in, more hands on, and you see them more and that is quite a big encouragement for the people working here" (Grand Harbour Payroll Coordinator, T12: 3). The General Manager saw his role as one of pulling together, or orchestrating, the expertise of others in his team:

"I see myself as leading this overall big business, with a lot of expertise surrounding me. And the first layer of expertise is the Executive, where you have your Finance Consultant, your HR Consultant, and together try to make the right choice in regards to finance, revenues, people, guests, operations and standards and try to very much have a two-way, as they are the experts on that function. And because I've got maybe a more helicopter view of those functions, how they interact, and what consequences [they] can be having on the other areas of the business ... then I support, to make or to reach together, the right way for it. And it touches the whole cornerstones of the business that goes from people to bottom-line profit. (Grand Harbour General Manager, T17: 1).

The General Manager's visibility and availability, typically, helped to make him a popular leader, and these attributes were seen as being important in bringing about change:

"the General Manager, he's a big influence and I think has been quite a big help to the hotel since he started. I think he's made a real difference to perhaps people's attitudes and he's not the kind of General Manager you find sat in his office. You quite often come down at 6 o'clock in the evening and see him standing by a concierge desk or helping someone with his luggage. He's not the kind of person to sit back and he'll get stuck in and do whatever is needed to help and he's quite often you'll see him come into the office and has a chat and asks how it's going and that makes a real difference" (Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator, T14: 8).

The General Manager was described as being accessible as a leader, someone who was seen as 'one of us', as one Restaurant Supervisor explained:

"he was a waiter and you can actually see that he's really approachable and he understands the issues of the restaurant, he was helping out as well and which shows that he's one of us, which is good to see ... someone is not just sitting behind the desk and looking at the figures" (Grand Harbour Restaurant Supervisor, T14: 12).

This connection with employees was described as being built, not just by getting actively involved, but by the level of interest he took in others, and their concerns:

"he's had a very good effect on people because people then [when he started] were probably a bit more negative. You speak to them and they sit there moaning about things. And so they go speak to him he'll talk to you. They think he won't do it and he does. He does get things sorted out, which is very good. He's a very positive character ... and he's actually there to listen to you and he bothers to take an interest, which is good" (Grand Harbour Reservations Supervisor, T16: 3).

In short: "He does listen, whereas, I think, the previous one did not listen" (Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor, T32: 3). His approach to managing his employees developed significant loyalty from some:

"[The General Manager] has been very good with coaching me. He's got a leadership style which I admire. I am an Arian. I am fiery. But I'm always very cautious to react emotionally. I would rant about it in my office before, arrange meetings to discuss, and you know your faults,

don't you? But I don't know. He just helped overcome that, really. He's helped me overcome the frustration part because to some degree, it's not that big a deal" (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 10).

The Grand Harbour employees were reflecting the General Manager's direct use of his influence to exert control over others, yet they drew attention to the way he supported, and invested his time in others, without disempowering them. This idea was picked up directly by his Personal Assistant:

"I think people have been given different accountability within their roles [by the General Manager], because you have either a style of manager that [the General Manager's predecessor] was previously, he very much liked to own everything himself and you didn't make a lot of decisions yourself. Everything had to go through him and that's not always a good thing. Whereas, [the General Manager's] style is you're accountable for your own departments, so all of a sudden all this responsibilities come back on them and a lot of people are not quite sure how to deal with that" (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 2).

A number of people interviewed made sense of the General Manager's behaviour by contrasting it to the previous General Manager. Sometimes, they sought to set up 'either-or' comparisons, as with the Guest Services Manager:

"You always get a certain amount of people who are not going to like the new GM's ways because GMs tend to be split. You tend to have those that are very direct and 'you do what I say' and 'it's all going to be this' and 'if it goes wrong it's your fault'. You get those types and you get the type like [the General Manager]; you give people duties and if it goes wrong then let's see how we can coach and counsel and if you're still doing it, then you're not up to the job" (Grand Harbour Guest Services Manager, T22: 14).

Here, the Guest Services Manager described a style contradictory to the 'hands on' manager attributed to the General Manager earlier, referring to an approach where he very deliberately gave his decision making power, and thereby his direct control, to others, and then sought to support them. Combined with his accessibility, this could have made for a popular, but potentially ineffective leader. However, as his Personal Assistant explained:

“If [the General Manager’s] not happy with something, he pulls the people into the office and explains to them why he’s not happy, but he does it in a very constructive way ... the previous manager who would have just gone off his noddle ... blown up at them, whereas [the General Manager] does do it in a very constructive way and gives them a chance to rectify it and then if it’s not rectified, it’s pulled back again and not so nice perhaps the second time. A bit more direct maybe the second time ... he comes across as very nice and sometimes people can think nice is a bit of a soft touch, but I’ve come across him a couple of times when he’s not been happy with something and you know when he’s not happy!” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T13: 12).

These, seemingly contradictory styles, were listed by some, without reference to their tensions: “He’s very focused, he’s very laid back, he wants the hotels to run very efficiently, but he wants us to, also, have a good time, as well” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T25: 4). The balance, between the General Manager caring for others and driving standards, was seen to be important in building respect:

“I think that he is very, very professional and I think that he has very good standards, but he is very much of a people person, not to the point of being too close to people, but enough that people can speak to him ... People respect him” (Grand Harbour Personal Assistant, T36: 6).

The General Manager’s approach was described as consistent: “He has a particular way that he manages, and that is through being honest and open with people, that has not changed the entire time, no matter what we have been through” (Grand Harbour Revenue Manager, T38: 18). Rather than creating uncertainty amongst employees, the combination of these contradictory styles, build significant loyalty towards the General Manager:

“He is the only manager that if he was to leave and go somewhere else, I would want to follow, and I’m not a big believer in that but I want to follow. He’s kept me engaged when I could have lost interest a year ago, and he’s kept me developing not technically, but as a leader. And so I feel that he’s invested me” (Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager, T34: 10-11).

## Small Story 7.2 – The General Manager’s Leadership

“at that [*Shine*] session with ten minutes closing ... I said to them, ‘I feel very, very special.’ And I said ‘the reason I feel very, very special is because I lead the best hotel in Southampton. And if I wasn’t very, very special frankly I wouldn’t be here today.’ Then I said to them, ‘if there is anything that I would like you to take away, I want you to know that you are special. The reason you are special is because I think you’re special, *De Vere* thinks you’re special because frankly, if you were not special, you wouldn’t be working for the premier hotel in Southampton. So if there is anything that I want to take away is to believe that you’re special ... And if there is one thing I want you to do and I don’t ask people to do things very often so directly, is I want you to wear this star. And I want you to wear the star not so that I know you’ve attended *Shine* or so that is part of the uniform, I want you to wear it so that every morning when you come to work, you look at the star in the mirror and you say, and you remind yourself that you are a star, not for anything else.’

One of the waiters came to me and said, ‘This is all good, [but] how do you want me to feel special when I come in from the back here and it’s dirty and it’s dark on the stairwell? ... I don’t feel special when I walk into that door.’ So we sat and said exactly what can we do. So then we put the ball back to the SCCM [Staff Consultative Committee Meeting] and we said, ‘Well, you asked the question, what do you want?’ And they came up with a nice yellow canopy, with a big star, saying ‘Star Entrance’ instead of ‘Staff Entrance’ and the stairwell will be painted a different colour ... with little stars everywhere” (Grand Harbour General Manager, T17: 3).

## 7.6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have sought to articulate the complicated nature of how power is deployed during organizational change. The focus has been on two competing managerial pressures balancing the use of power - taking control or allowing autonomy. Achieving an effective equilibrium, was of particular concern at *De Vere* Group, as senior managers were simultaneously driving for improved customer service, through greater employee autonomy, and for reduced costs, through the centralisation of services. While, potentially, the policies and programmes to achieve these objectives were in contradiction,

they were made sense of by managers and employees. Accessibility of managers, and trust in their actions and intentions, allowed their seemingly contradictory behaviours to be seen as consistent, and rather than create confusion the simultaneous deployment of autonomy and control built respect and loyalty.

## **8. DISCUSSION**

### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contains three different ‘readings’ of my research data, each seeking to develop meaning in the data presented, and taking as a starting point a particular perspective. My intention, with this chapter, was not to have the final word, but rather to act as an organiser and participant in a dialogue (Bakhtin 1984), and produce a ‘writerly’, rather than a ‘readerly’ text, where:

“The readerly text achieves closure and positions the reader as a passive consumer of its meaning ... [A writerly text] does not present the reader with pre-packaged meaning, but rather encourages the reader to participate in the production of that meaning” (Barthes, 1974: 110-111).

This is not my first step in interpretation. To construct the previous four chapters, in which I have presented data created during my interviews with De Vere Group managers and employees, I have already had to make choices. I had to select the categories to code text into, then how to organise the codes, imposing a hierarchy. I have, then, chosen to foreground certain constructs, and background others, before assembling the chapters, binding them together into a coherent narrative. I accept that “it is an illusion that I, as a researcher, can write in a way that ‘captures’ the experiences of ‘real’ people” (Rhodes, 2001: 43-44) and I am aware of the interpretation I have already applied to the interviewees’ own stories. I have kept my biases as unobtrusive as possible and set out to present the polyphony of complex change. In so doing, I have sacrificed some readability, by resisting the simplification of reducing diverse voices into simple plotlines, which were not evident in my interview data. I have imposed more of myself onto this chapter, while maintaining the richness of my data. Stronger themes do emerge: on the way in which sense is taken from ‘official’ stories, whether they are expressly articulated or not; on how stories can be both clear and ambiguous, allowing De Vere management to use autonomy as a strategy of control; and the significance of leaders’ behaviour in creating a dialogue, and preventing stories becoming self-sealing (Beech et al., 2009). These themes all reinforce the



importance of reflexivity, for the researcher and for change practitioners, and the perspective of change as continuous adaptation.

The first reading (section 8.2) examines how questions raised by the literature, on narrative and storytelling, are reflected within, or illuminated by, the stories told in De Vere. Organizational change is the starting perspective for the second reading (section 8.3), and in recognition of the significant presence of my 'own voice', and my own changes in thinking during the research, I have concluded these three readings with an autoethnographic section (8.3). This reading makes explicit my own experience during the completion of this research project, accepting the "need for reflexive authorship that can work in recognition of the tension between (re)presentation and control" (Rhodes, 2001: 17), and recognising that any "residual notion that the researcher is some kind of independent, objective observer has to be abandoned. Intervening in an organization always affects it" (Stacey, 1996: 261). Throughout this discussion chapter, my aim has been to author an interesting narrative of my interviewees' stories of their experience of organizational change, and to describe how the co-creation of this discussion chapter has been influenced by, and has influenced, my own story. The chapter concludes with my reflections on these separate readings and how they contribute to the overall thesis (section 8.4).

## **8.2 STORYTELLING READING**

### **8.2.1 Making Sense of Complexity**

Narrative plays an important role in allowing sense to be made of complex situations, encountered in organizational life (Brown & Humphreys, 2003; Robinson & Haupe, 1986; Czarniawska, 1999); as Czarniawska (1997: 29) claims, an interpretive approach can "further our understanding of the complex and unpredictable." This section reflects on the stories of complex events, or processes, occurring in De Vere Group at the time of my research, and how these were made sense of by my interviewees. Sensemaking involves the "placement of items into frameworks" (Weick, 1995: 6), or "consists of

attempts to integrate a new event into a plot, whereby it becomes understandable in relation to the context of what has happened" (Czarniawska, 1999: 16), and a corporate strategy is one such plot for making sense of an organization. The De Vere Group four-part strategy was a means by which the Chief Executive and his Executive Team understood their organization. It was clearly, and consistently, articulated by this senior group, and repeated in external communications. With "strategy as a form of narrative" (Barry & Elmes, 1997: 430), the storyline of the De Vere Group strategy might be expected to be a central theme in conversations throughout the organization, a reference point to which other related narratives connect. However, there was no discernible reference to this four-part strategy anywhere outside of Central Office. Even at the Warrington head office connections were only made indirectly by my interviewees. While the strategy narrative helped the senior Executives make sense of their situations, other organization members did not necessarily have the same need for this particular sense to be made, perhaps preventing the strategy story 'sticking', or becoming an important narrative for everyone in the organization. As Thachankary (1992: 231) asserts:

"the notion of plurivocity, that there are multiple meanings in the story, is very empowering, because it gives organizational participants considerable flexibility to create their own interpretation of what is going on".

The Chief Executive had created his own version of a strategy and, perhaps, his assertion that De Vere did not have a strategy when he arrived, could be interpreted as not having one in a form that made sense for him. Given "what we experience as organization is the outcome of an interactive sense-making process" (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 968), the development of a strategy for the Chief Executive, and his direct team, was an important sensemaking activity, as they created organization.

The introduction of *Shine* as a programme, and as a new set of stories into De Vere, could be interpreted as De Vere Executives' way of connecting everyone

to the consequences of the strategy important for their sensemaking. As with the strategy, the senior managers in De Vere had a rich, complex description of *Shine*, its past, present and future. In spite of significant personal effort, and the investment of time and money, employees in the hotels often gave what I contend to be a simplified interpretation of *Shine*, when interviewed. In making this judgment, I recognise “there is apparently no consensus around when a system is complex” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 985). Some employees described *Shine* as little more than ‘getting together with people we didn’t know so that we can be more of a team’, or they recounted their experience as having had ‘a good laugh’. However, even without the richness of the full *Shine* story, the essence of working together to give their customers a special experience was present in almost all interviewees’ stories, and seemed a sufficient ‘terse’ story (Boje, 1995) to support changes in behaviour. The General Managers and Heads of Department were able to tell a more detailed *Shine* story, but still containing nothing of the complexity perceived by Central Office.

So what was *Shine* in De Vere? The story of *Shine* changed throughout the organization. Taking the complexity of *Shine* as a feature of the interaction between a reification of it, and the members of the De Vere organization (Casti, 1986: 149), then the stories told about *Shine* suggest that, for many employees, *Shine* was a simple call to take responsibility to work together, and show initiative in serving their customer, so that he or she returned to a De Vere Hotel in the future. This seems to have been sufficient to sense make for them, and to then be able to act. For the senior managers, *Shine* was a complex, and carefully crafted, set of interventions and an intricate narrative. If a cynical interpretation was taken, this story could be told as unnecessary complexity, introduced by the senior managers, ably assisted by external consultants, to justify their own roles, self images and salaries. Alternatively, the complexity created in the interaction between *Shine* and the senior managers could be viewed as matching the complexity of the challenge they faced: for senior managers raising customer service across many sites, and

multiple branded operations, in response to changing market conditions; for a receptionist or waiter how to do something special for an individual customer. Brown and Humphreys (2003: 135) suggest that: “in complex, internally differentiated organizations separate groups will tend to evolve distinct understandings”, so here, individuals could be interpreted as interacting with the narrative of *Shine* in a way consistent with their own sensemaking needs. Managers and employees appeared to “reframe what they have heard, tag it to their own situations, and take their own sense from it” (Sims et al., 2009: 383). The level of complexity interpreted in the *Shine* narrative changed over time, as the need for more elaboration increased. As further activities were introduced - Shining Star Awards, *Shine* lunches, and so on – employees were able to ‘build up’ meaning from their terse version of the *Shine* story. This follows Weick’s (1979: 261) advice for managing paradoxical social systems that “practitioners ‘complicate’ themselves ... by generating and accommodating multiple, inequivalent descriptions.”

*Shine* could be considered an ‘official’ story, initiated and supported by the senior managers in De Vere. As Boje, in his work on Disney, asserts:

“There is an official discourse and there are many marginalised discourses in every organization ... point here is not that the Disney version is untrue, but that it marginalises and eliminates many characters with stories worth telling” (Boje, 1995).

In contrast to *Shine*, some events at De Vere occurred without an ‘official story’, but still required sense to be made by those involved. The departure of the General Manager at Royal Bath was recounted as a surprise by interviewees. Tsoukas and Hatch (2001: 989) argue that the unexpected nature of an event is related to how the organizational story is understood:

“we interpret the non-linearity of complex systems as counterintuitive or surprising, but the surprise rests on our perspective and in our violated expectations, not in the system we describe in this way” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 989).

With no 'official' reason given, these individuals were left to examine their understandings of the story, in this case the characterisation of the General Manager as a good leader, and Royal Bath as a high performing hotel. Sense was made, by some, through the generation of a new storyline, or confirmation of an emerging one, that new AHG Directors were unreasonable, or knew little about running hotels, so were unable to see the General Manager's virtues. Others focused on the future potential refurbishment of Royal Bath as explanation, a story strengthened by the appointment of a new General Manager with refurbishment experience. While, for some interviewees, it was necessary to review their prior assessments, and retell their stories as 'The General Manager was not as good as he looked'. This need to make sense was most marked in the former General Manager's own difficulty to move on from the episode, without understanding why he was fired. These differing story constructions illustrate that "survival in a world of meanings is problematic without the talent to make up and to interpret stories about interweaving lives" (Sarbin, 1986: 11). They also provide an example of 'sense-taking' (Clarke et al., 2005; Mills & Weatherbee, 2006), where "the sense taken is not necessarily made in any obvious way from the materials to hand at the time" (Sims et al., 2009: 376).

As an episode in the De Vere story, this General Manager's departure produced strong negative reaction, including shock, fear, and uncertainty, which may have reflected the significant discord between individuals' sense of the world, and what was implied by this particular event. Occasions for sensemaking are intensified by events that violate existing perceptual frameworks (Weick, 1995). 'He is a good General Manager, but he has been fired' did not make immediate sense for others at Royal Bath, encouraging new stories to emerge.

This same incident illuminated the importance of how connected an individual's own story is to the main threads of the collective organizational story, with the narrative scheme acting as a lens through which the apparently

independent and disconnected elements are seen as related parts of a whole (Polkinghorne, 1988: 36), and “organizational change occur[ing] simultaneously in our selves and in our organizations” (Hazen, 1994: 72). The new General Manager, hired to replace the outgoing individual, was brought in to ‘do the refurbishment’. This was a story the incoming General Manager used to justify his own move to Bournemouth, and a plotline picked up by others to explain the exit of the prior, popular General Manager. The new General Manager was strongly connected to this thread of the overall AHG story, and to the specific plot unfolding for the Royal Bath. Consequently, his reactions to the repeated delay, and finally the postponement of the refurbishment, were strongly negative, as his own identity as leading the refurbishment was challenged; change is threatening not only because it effects people’s self-esteem, but also, and maybe more importantly, because it disrupts people’s need for identity consistency and continuity (Hogg & Terry, 2000). In a similar fashion, several of the De Vere managers and employees described the departure of their direct line-manager as the most significant change they had faced. Once again, a line-manager is likely to be an important character in an individual’s own narrative, and a new manager may well prompt significant shifts in how sense is made, and how organizational life is narrated.

The stories told by my interviewees did appear to be central to how they made sense of their organizational lives. They were able to adapt existing stories to fit with their individual needs for meaning, either reducing complex stories to terse statements, or building these same statements back up, as and when required. Where an ‘official’ narrative was not available, employees took sense anyway, in order to maintain the continuity of their own story. Their own reactions to organizational situations appeared related to the degree to which they needed to change their story, or their understanding of the organization’s story, in order to fit with their interpretation of events.

### 8.2.2 Exercising Power

The stories told by the managers and the employees interviewed, provided insight into the changing power relations in De Vere. Power and meaning are strongly related, as:

“groups interested in preserving and advancing their interests must persuade others of their legitimacy. Power is thus not a thing and nor should it be thought of as an unexercised capacity, but as a matter of the successful deployment of meaning” (Brown, 1998: 49).

One such group was the De Vere Directors, who told the *Shine* story, both during their interviews and throughout the programme, as encouraging freedom of choice at all hierarchical levels. By seeking to legitimate this particular interpretation they were exercising their power (Brown, 1998: 38). There was an emphasis, in these stories, on individual employee decision making, especially when interacting with the customer, and the encouragement of personal responsibility for self, and team development, to meet the challenges implied by this approach. This ‘permission’ to demonstrate initiative on behalf of the customer was, typically, well received by all, and the reactions to the required changes were for the most part positive. The veracity of the interpretation of *Shine*, like many stories was not frequently challenged, as:

“Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and ‘narrative necessity’ rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness, although ironically we have no compunction about calling stories true or false” (Bruner, 1991: 4-5).

Furthermore, the *Shine* narrative included a structured and, potentially, compelling argument as to the personal, and organizational, benefits of increased autonomy, making it hard to contest; as Czarniawska (1999: 15) argues: “power does not reside in the difference between fact and fiction but in a convincing interpretation”. However, “senior management’s narrative is [only] one of multiple claims that can be made about an organization” (Chreim, 2005: 573). Where an attack on the arguments in *Shine* was made, it was at the employee level, demonstrating “the shared narratives of

subordinate groups are a significant means by which they attempt to contest and resist the worldviews of their superiors” (Brown & Humphreys, 2003: 137). Here the narrative had, perhaps, been less strongly communicated, or had been reduced to a ‘terse’ form. In contrast, there were many stories concerning increased confidence, respect by managers and the opportunity to take initiative from employees interviewed, though for some this was seen as ‘rule bending’, suggesting that there was still a strong expectation of control; as Czarniawska argues (1997: 38): “whatever the details, the leader’s role is to provide the rest of the cast and the audience with the illusion of controllability”.

One of the few challenges to the *Shine* narrative came from a porter at Royal Bath. His attack was on the grounds that *Shine* was simply another instrument of management control. His reaction was possibly stronger as he saw this exercise of power as ‘dressed up’ by the *Shine* narrative. Could the *Shine* narrative be read as an instrument of management control, rather than an attempt to empower and give free choice? This will have been dependent on the interpretation of *Shine* as people sought to make sense of it:

“efforts to extend managerial hegemony are, we contend, merely punctuations in the flow of organizational life, and their impact will depend on how they are interpreted and reinterpreted by others in their efforts to make sense of unfolding processes of organizing. (Brown & Humphreys, 2003: 123).

More subtle forms of control through stories have been highlighted by scholars (e.g. Martin, 1992; Martin & Powers, 1993; Wilkins, 1983), and the *Shine* story was used by the senior leaders in De Vere Group to provide direction, as well as empowerment. There was a strong framework of desired behaviour, as part of the *Shine* story, expressed through the corporate values, the brand definitions, and customer touch points. These were used within Grand Harbour, for example, as a ‘yardstick’ to measure individual suitability and to legitimise a toughening-up on performance management, as well as a justification for dramatic changes in the management ranks. There was an



implicit, and sometimes explicit, message that ‘these are the values we hold, so live by them or leave’. The *Shine* programme also left little latitude for autonomy, either for those leading or attending the workshops. Everyone was required to attend the programme and there was a clearly defined structure for those running the workshops. General Managers were supported at the ‘Skill Building Events’ to deliver the workshop within their own style, but within a prescribed framework. Furthermore, the scope for employees to exercise independent action on behalf of customers was arguably small. Viewed in this way, *Shine* could be interpreted as exercising senior management control, in spite of the espoused empowerment message. Arguably, autonomy was simply a strategy for management control.

“Providing or invoking a context for meaning making is ... an important part of narrating” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 998) and the differing messages within the *Shine* narrative were interpreted, by De Vere managers and employees, in light of the broader organizational stories concerning power, control and autonomy. The actions of the Chief Executive, and the Directors of De Vere Group, were set against a history of high autonomy for each hotel, with the General Manager left to make the decisions, without any form of consistent processes across the organization. At the same time as *Shine*, there was also significant centralisation of common services, and the movement of decision making power away from the hotels. This included changes in organizational structure, removing, for example, customer reservations from the hotels to a central team in Warrington, and projects to introduce consistent processes (for example, an efficiency initiative named *Optima*, focused on resource levels and employee shift patterns). With a lack of common procedures at the shop floor level, there was still, people said, a sense of personal choice, especially compared with competitor organizations, such as Marriott. These ‘central-control’ themes, in the overall organizational story, were not included in the *Shine* narrative, where the focus from those designing and running the programme was dominated by the encouragement of individual autonomy. This offers some explanation for the cynicism of some employees, perhaps

reacting to a perception of a 'hidden agenda' on behalf of the organization's leaders, and questions De Vere senior manager's true commitment to employee autonomy.

The actions of new owners, AHG, after the takeover of De Vere Group in September 2006, provide an interesting contrast to *Shine* in the exercise of power. The Directors of AHG were consistently described by the General Managers and Heads of Department, at the case study hotels, as exerting more control than their previous leaders, and taking away autonomy from the hotels. The stories, told by the hotel management, focused on a number of high profile operational decisions taken by the AHG Directors, without, in the view of the people in hotels, discussion or consultation. However, outside of these structural changes, there was less prescription in the AHG stories on how people should behave, than there was through relating to *Shine*. The apparent lack of consultation led the hotel managers to reflect their feelings of a lack of autonomy in their stories about AHG. This may provide evidence that making sense of changes has as a "key input to this process ... the interpretation of events and of their implications, provided by managers" (Dunford & Jones, 2000: 1222). The absence of an interpretation or story from the AHG Directors, may account for the diversity of interpretation, with some employees interpreting, or taking sense from, the decisions by AHG, as the new owners, as a legitimate exercising of their power. The stories told by these employees referred to AHG 'having spent their own money' in buying De Vere, making them more justified in exercising power than their predecessors under the Plc arrangements.

There are examples of shifts in the way power was being exercised, throughout the case study. The 'official' *Shine* narrative was one of increased autonomy down the organization, and this generated many supporting stories in the organization. The stories around *Shine* were also used, by senior management, as a means to exercise power and control more covertly. The narratives about successful leaders in De Vere, for example, the Chief

Executive and General Manager at Grand Harbour, followed a similar pattern. They were both described in the stories told as relaxed, empowering leaders, involved and engaged with their employees. However, there were contradictory plots, positioning these leaders as having significant power and control over their organizations, with their closest colleagues describing them as anything, but relaxed. This demonstrates how the complexity of contrasting styles and approaches can be 'contained' in a narrative structure, without any sense of disharmony for those recounting the stories:

"In our everyday reasoning about social reality we live comfortably with apparent contradictions. We want explanations which are convincing enough to be accepted as true, but recognise there could be alternative accounts which tell a different, but equally persuasive story" (Robinson & Haupe, 1986: 115)

The narrative concerning the takeover by AHG had similar contrasting elements of autonomy and control, though most of the interviewees chose to give precedence to a perceived exertion of power, by the AHG Directors. This was combined, in the stories of interviewees, with erratic communication, to create the perception of reduced autonomy for the hotels and their managers. A contrasting interpretation of less involvement and communication meaning more freedom for the hotels was rarely articulated. Both the De Vere and the AHG Directors were exercising their power to control activities and behaviours in the organization. The *Shine* story was successful in encouraging a perception of increased autonomy for managers and employees in De Vere, whereas, without the resource of an 'official' story, the AHG Directors' behaviour was interpreted as controlling.

### **8.2.3 Influencing Collective Identity**

Collective identity refers to characteristics that members of a collective feel are central to defining who they are (Albert & Whetten 1985). Brown (2006: 732) further defines identities: "as complexes of in-progress stories and story-fragments, which are in a perpetual state of becoming". He further argues narratives relevant to collective identity are: "stories about organizations that actors' author in their efforts to understand, or make sense of, the collective

entities with which they identify” (Brown, 2006:734). Much of the storytelling at De Vere relates to these definitions, and had as a core purpose the creation, maintenance, and revision of the collective organizational identity. Understandings of De Vere were altered by managers and employees, as they discussed organizational events and episodes as:

“identity is a reflexive project that consists of sustaining continuously revised biographical narratives that must integrate events occurring in the external world into the ongoing story” (Chreim, 2005: 570).

Therefore, the introduction of *Shine*, responses to changes in organizational structure, and new corporate ownership, all necessitated managers and employees adjusting their conceptions of the collective entity of De Vere, and of themselves within the organizational context. This was not solely at the level of the whole organization, as there were strong narratives describing identity with the individual hotels, whether it was the aspirations of a school leaver to work in the impressive Grand Harbour or the new General Manager of Royal Bath setting out to re-establish the hotel as a part of Bournemouth’s history. Longer serving employees identified more strongly with the hotel, than the broader organization, especially those who had seen the corporate structures change several times, experienced Chief Executives come and go, and worked under multiple General Managers - four in the case of Royal Bath’s Operations Manager. This identification with the hotels may have helped reduce the uncertainty introduced by the corporate level changes, as managers and employees adopted highly focused, and consensually agreed, in-groups and out-groups (Hogg, 2000).

Being part of a larger organization, and one with a recognisable brand, had positive associations for most interviewees. For some, the change of ownership to AHG, and particularly the organization’s move from a public company to a private shareholding challenged their relationship with the organization. The stories about AHG Directors not being hoteliers, but finance men, distanced them from managers and employees, and potentially reduced the extent to which they wanted or were able to identify with them. In fact,

many of the senior AHG leadership had significant hotel management experience, but this was rarely reflected in the stories told. There was an increase in the cynical and skeptical stories told in reaction to the change in ownership, perhaps reflecting a move away from previously shared organizational identity narratives or, conversely, a step closer to them, in order to fight off the 'aggressor', and defend their identification with the 'former' De Vere.

The 'official' *Shine* story set out to shift the perception of the way in which De Vere managed its relationships: with its employees, through the defined corporate values; and its customers, with new brand positioning and corporate identities. The physical look of the brand was changed, along with the colours, though neither formed any part of the stories told about De Vere, with the exception of some frustration at wasted corporate brochures bearing the wrong logo. In contrast, the classification of Grand Harbour under the Heritage brand by AHG, rather than a Deluxe caused considerable reaction, perhaps further evidence of the strength of association with the hotel, rather than the broader organization. While logical arguments against the classification formed part of the stories, there was a strong emotional component too. The Grand Harbour was one of the few five-star rated properties in the Group and the modern hotel did not fit comfortably alongside its more traditional sister properties in the Heritage brand. As Fiol and O'Connor (2002: 535) contend: "identities are held together by emotions as well as cognitive understandings of self". As a consequence, they argue: "the motivation for maintaining a constant and stable sense of self in the face of potential change tends to lead to heated resistance" (Fiol & O'Connor, 2002: 537). The 'down grading' of Grand Harbour may well have been a threat to individual self-esteem (Brockner, 1988), and there was relief on its subsequent reclassification as a Deluxe hotel.

During the *Shine* workshops managers were asked to think about their own personal development and, possibly, own sense of self, in the context of the

narratives associated with corporate values, and brand positioning of the organization. This juxtaposition could be interpreted as a direct attempt to make connections between individual self-narratives and stories about De Vere. This was done by asking managers and employees to see one in the context of the other, as Weick (1995: 20) asserts: “once I know who I am, I know what is out there”. They were asked to interweave organizational and personal narratives, where “parts and wholes in a narrative rely on each other for their viability” (Bruner, 1991: 8), with an unspoken implication that they were required to accept the ‘official’ organizational narrative, to be successful as leaders in De Vere.

This approach of imposing an ‘official’, univocal narrative about the organization, did attempt to allow for a multi-vocal response. For example, managers completed an exercise in mapping their personal values, and were then asked to engage in discussion around the opportunities, or challenges, presented by a requirement to ‘live’ the corporate values. However, as Rhodes (2001: 23), drawing on Hazen (1993), reflected, not everyone has an equal say, as “each person who is part of the organization has a voice in the text, but where some voices are louder, more articulate and more powerful than others”. What remained unsaid were the consequences of a poor ‘fit’ between individual and organization. Subsequent actions in the hotels, at Grand Harbour for example, suggested that ‘fitting-in’ was a requirement of continued employment. The hotel management used their power as “those who are symbolically privileged use their advantages to promulgate identity narratives that foster certain understandings at the expense of others” (Brown, 2006:739). In the creation of organizational identity narratives “some discourses are more hegemonic than others and thus marginalise the other discourses.” (Boje, 1995), and while there was some recognition in De Vere of plurivocity, the imposition of an ‘official’ story, and its adoption as part of the identity narratives, was a clear objective for *Shine*. This further establishes the covert ‘control’ agenda of the senior managers.

#### 8.2.4 Defining Stories and Storytelling

In telling a story about change in De Vere Group between 2005 and 2007, I have attempted to recount an organizational context, so that individual stories can be interpreted. In doing so, I recognise the collective context both informs, and is informed by, personal narratives, as “the telling of stories is a way of making sense” (Salzer-Morling, 1998: 116), and that “the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sensemaking” (Boje, 1995: 1000). How successful have I been at capturing individual and collective context? Do I make a good storyteller of the stories of the experiences of change in De Vere? With meaning and knowledge constructed, and not found in events, my story cannot be simply judged on its accuracy in telling *the* story, as:

“there is no single basically basic story subsisting beneath it, but, rather, an unlimited number of other narratives that can be constructed in response to it or perceived as related to it” (Smith, 1981: 217).

Authenticity, plausibility, coherence, all seem possible alternative benchmarks, yet are all subjective to the reader, and to their purpose for reading. Robinson and Haupe (1986: 121) offer an explanation for unsuccessful narratives: “stories fail for two reasons: because they are incomplete, that they lack some essential information, or because they are unconvincing, the causal model is inappropriate”. Once again an individual interpretation is required. My story is a reconstruction, in response to the stories I have heard, and every subsequent reader will build their own narrative in reaction to it, as “stories in organization are self-deconstructing, flowing, emerging and networking, not at all static” (Boje, 2001: 1). So what is the ‘status’ of my reconstituted story? In many ways it is no different from anyone else’s story. Each of my interviewees was portraying something that was uniquely their composition. They, too, have selected and ignored data available to them, in order to construct an overall narrative, one which allows them to make sense. I have done the same. I have had some different tools, NVivo, for example, and a different purpose, to complete a piece of research to a formally examined standard, but

my objective has been the same as my interviewees - to make sense of organizational change.

The consideration of terse narratives, which “sometimes amount to little more than opinions, platitudes or explanations, supported by quasi-facts and quasi-details” (Brown et al., 2009: 329) has gained recent attention and support (e.g. Beech et al, 2009; Boje, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Whittle et al. 2009). I had concerns with my methodology during my data analysis. In particular, I worried over the fragmentation of an individual’s story into, often, terse segments, and then the sorting of these into themes. In this method, each individual comment is taken out of the context in which it was told, and associated with fragments from other individual stories. While risking the loss of some of the intended meaning, this approach has allowed for a story to be built about the collective experience at De Vere. It is a product of my construction, but then there is no other combining force, as the organization has no story, nor a voice to tell it. In this process, I treated any utterance, however short, as story material to complete my own narrative, though I was conscious of:

“The most evident danger of story-based research is the use of organizational narratives to amplify or reinforce the researcher’s preconceived ideas or assumptions. Organizational narratives then become ingredients in the researcher’s own agendas. They are especially pernicious because of their plastic and memorable qualities.” (Gabriel, 2000: 151)

I wrestled with the amount of interpretation I was placing on others’ stories, yet, without this interpreting I had a set of statements, with little association and little narrative flow. At the extreme, the plurivocal story becomes an unreadable set of disconnected statements, without the context of the situation from which they were taken to provide coherence. Humphreys et al. (2003: 21) draw a parallel between the ethnographer and the jazz soloist and calls for a “very broad conception of ethnography as a fundamentally creative, explorative and interpretive process”, that produces work which is “polyphonic, which juxtaposes multiple styles and analyses, is self-critical, and



sensitive to the problematics of representation” (Humphreys et al., 2003: 21). While attempting this complex task with my data, I was drawn to maintain ‘whole’ accounts, in order to leave specific comments more in the context of the individual’s own story. The use of more substantial quotations and ‘small stories’, throughout my data presentation, has been one result of this concern.

An alternative method would have been to extend this approach and consider ‘more complete stories’ as my basic unit of analysis; to look for “stories and storytelling in the narrow sense of narratives with simple but resonant plots and characters, involving narrative skill, entailing risk, and aiming to entertain, persuade and win over” (Gabriel, 2000: 22). Within my interview questions, see Appendix 1, I asked managers and employees for stories of this form directly, though recognised: “they are furtive, fragile, and delicate creatures. They can easily be driven away, they can emerge without being noticed, they can rigidify into descriptions and reports, and they can be killed” (Gabriel, 2000: 136). However, these ‘whole stories’ become just as decontextualised once they are separated from the situation in which they were told, and from the storytelling performance, as “stories are not just chronologies (a sequence of events), but situated, responsive performances” (Cunliffe et al., 2004: 273).

Seeking to identify these ‘self-contained’ narratives elevates the story beyond the storytelling, reifying it as something that maintains a stable meaning, separate from the context in which it was constructed, or the new setting in which it is placed when retold. My primary concern was to examine the storied nature of organizational life, where everything is part of a plot or characterisation, whether available to the listener or not. Therefore, the only meaning available to me for any story, however terse, is the meaning I derive from my interpretation of the context in which it was made. My interpretation will then further alter as it is read and interpreted by each reader, as they form their own meaning from my story. While seeking to understand the meaning intended by the storyteller remains a critical part of the research process, and any subsequent reading, the nature of stories recounted is only important to

the extent that they are able to convey my intended interpretation. The stories of *Shine*, and other organizational changes in De Vere, were told by my interviewees in both elaborate and terse form to communicate their understanding, and I have used both in seeking to convey my interpretation of their meaning. The meaning may “drain out” of stories as they “shrivel over time” (Gabriel, 2000: 21), but they still form material from which meaning can be made, as they are ‘rehydrated’ with meaning in a new storytelling. The challenge of finding the balance between an incoherent, polyphonic account and a clear, single narrative that draws too heavily on the researcher’s interpretive prejudices, suggests possible limitations of this representational strategy.

### **8.3 ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE READING**

#### **8.3.1 The End of the *Shine* Story?**

In approaching organizational change from a storytelling perspective, I have been concerned with “discourses and discursive strategies employed in the social construction of organizational change as a meaningful phenomenon” (Demers, 2007: 195). My own experience of organizational change, as an employee and manager in several organizations, was as something difficult to fit into the neat categories often suggested by many of the classic change theories, such as Lewin’s (1947) ‘unfreeze, change, refreeze’ model, and “it has been said that the whole theory of change is reducible to this one idea of Kurt Lewin” (Hendry, 1996: 624). The typical storyline of “first there were losses, then there was a plan of change, and then there was an implementation, which led to unexpected results” (Czarniawska & Jorges, 1996: 20), did not reflect the messy complexity of my experience. I was seeking a continuous perspective on change (Weick & Quinn, 1999) that did not generalise away complexity.

In spite of this personal bias, however, episodic change remained a strong feature of the stories told by De Vere managers and employees, perhaps, in a similar way to a good narrative, episodes within the continuous flow of a

change enabling the storyteller to engage his or her audience. Continuous change is hard to see, or to articulate, without comparisons over time, and “there has been little attempt to understand the nature of change on its own terms and to treat stability, order and organization as exceptional states” (Chia, 1999: 210). In spite of my starting commitment to continuous change, I set out to examine a particular episode in the organizational life of De Vere - *Shine*. This demonstrates, perhaps, how pervasive the episodic view of change is, or simply how difficult it is to describe movement (Chia, 1999: 209). However, the stories of *Shine* were intertwined with the narratives of the messiness of organizational life from the outset of my interviews, before unexpectedly the ‘leading character’ in my story, *Shine*, was ‘killed-off’ following the takeover of AHG.

Prior to these complications, there had already been two distinctly different narratives of change unfolding at Royal Bath and Grand Harbour respectively. At Royal Bath, there were stories of *Shine* fading before the AHG takeover (e.g. Royal Bath Food Services Manager, T59: 12), or never even getting going beyond the initial workshops (e.g. Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager, T54: 59). It was from the Royal Bath that the majority of cynical stories about *Shine* were heard (e.g. Royal Bath Porter, T46: 4). Perhaps, for some, *Shine* did not have the impact on their own story, or their stories about the organization, to be anything but a passing episode. Even with stories containing a beginning, middle and end, the recipients only take away fragments, to embed in their own stories (Sims et al., 2009). This skepticism could be interpreted as resistance to change, while the managers and the employees of Royal Bath take time to make sense out of the implications of *Shine*, in a self-defensive effort to reduce anxiety, and ambiguity (Weber & Manning, 2001: 229).

Another possible explanation, for the lack of impact, could be rooted in interviewees’ conceptions of change as episodic; without further visible episodes, like the initial workshops, any impact or ongoing change was not

noticeable. Without a continuous, or narrative, conception of change would managers and employees have noticed shifts in their language and behaviour with customers, or even if they did, how would they make the association with *Shine*, which was conceived of as an event? In contrast to Royal Bath, the experience at Grand Harbour was that *Shine* 'was talked about by everyone' and was more embedded in the stories of daily life. The responses to the changes embodied in the *Shine* story received dominantly positive responses, including enthusiasm, engagement and optimism. Tsoukas and Hatch (2001: 1002) argue: "when organizational members are asked to justify their actions, they do so in the terms provided by the organizational discourses in which they participate". At Grand Harbour the General Manager, Operations Manager and Human Resources Manager, were all described as actively promoting the language of *Shine*, and fostering working relationships in the spirit of the corporate values. These approaches are more associated with a continuous conception of change.

In considering change as the "alterations in people's understandings, encoded in narratives, and shared in conversations" (Brown & Humphreys, 2003: 121), *Shine* was involved in fostering change, especially at Grand Harbour. There were other changes in understandings, in evidence in the stories told by De Vere managers and employees, including significant alterations to individual narratives. For example, the stories of the General Manager at Grand Harbour described his experience of the changing context, and marked a shift from: enthusiastic newcomer to De Vere; through becoming a recognised strong performer; into a frustrated leader, hiding his activities - with good intentions - from his bosses for fear of their disapproval.

Articulating organizational changes is more difficult. In taking organizational change as shifts in the stories told about the organization, perhaps observable through alterations in common stories, or the 'grand narratives', that define the organization, we need to recognise the diversity of perspectives articulated by organizational members. Even the stories told about the same

organizational event contain significant difference, as well as similarity. There were clear episodes, which were reflected in narratives about the organization, including: *Shine*, a focus on creating special experiences for customers; the AHG takeover; a reduction in perceived autonomy for General Managers; redundancies; and the centralisation of Reservations, followed by Human Resources. There were organizational stories specific to each of the hotels: the planned refurbishment, and the change in General Manager at Royal Bath; the high turnover of Heads of Department and the leadership style of the General Manager at Grand Harbour. The continuous shifts in emphasis are difficult to capture beyond these lists of episodes or themes, but are contained within the rich stories of interviewees, as they “structure the unknown” (Waterman, 1990: 41) into “sensible” events (Huber & Daft, 1987: 154) in their efforts “to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate and predict” (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988: 51), retold in the data presentation chapters.

Deciding whether *Shine* did end with the AHG acquisition, perhaps, depends on your perspective on narrative and change. In viewing change as episodic, *Shine* was replaced by another event, or episode, *Verve*, which then also faded after initial programmes. However, many employees described *Verve* as the continuation of *Shine*, and many of the perspectives on *Shine* had become part of managers’ and employees’ language, so with a continuous change perspective much of *Shine* lived on. I had dinner with the General Manager of Grand Harbour, a year after the completion of my research, and our waiter was still wearing his *Shine* Star lapel badge, received at his workshop, and when asked was able to talk about the importance of shining for the customer.

### **8.3.2 Intertwining Stories of Change**

To describe the consequences of a narrative perspective on the nature of organizational life scholars have drawn creatively on different analogies. Boje compared organizations to *Tamara*, a play, where:

“Instead of remaining stationary, viewing a single stage, the audience fragments into small groups that chase characters from one room to the next, from one floor to the next, even going into bedrooms, kitchens, and other chambers to chase and co-create the stories that interest them the most ... people can even be in the same room and - if they came there by way of different rooms and character-sequences - each can walk away from the same conversation with entirely different stories” (Boje, 1995: 998)

For Brown (2006: 735) “the very fabric of organization is constantly being created and re-created through elaboration, contestation and exchange of narratives”, which produces a patchwork quilt, with central narratives highly connected to others, and peripheral stories with limited connections. With change as alterations in this fabric of organizational stories, this section considers how the central or 'official' stories in De Vere connect and intertwine with the peripheral stories in the ‘unmanaged’ organization to create a shifting organizational quilt of narratives. The ‘unmanaged’ organization is “an uncolonised terrain, a terrain that is not and cannot be managed, in which people, both individually and in groups, can engage in all kinds of unsupervised, spontaneous activity” (Gabriel, 2000: 112) and the “boundaries between managed and unmanaged organization are rarely rigid” (Gabriel, 1995: 489).

The ‘grand narrative’ (Lyotard, 1984) in De Vere could be considered in the form of the monomyth (Campbell, 1956) or hero's journey, with a new Chief Executive, and his newly recruited leadership team, on a quest to overcome the organization's under-performance of the past, by progressively removing the villains - the previous managers as the perpetrators of a ‘cosy’ culture – in order to rally employees on a crusade towards improved financial performance, which would allow De Vere to remain independent of other corporate aggressors. One such battle was rebuffing the takeover attempt of GPG in March 2004, and the battle cry was carried forward to employees through *Shine*, but derailed, perhaps by ‘too little too late’, and the takeover of AHG. This left the ‘heroes’ to take their lessons learnt elsewhere, and the

organization to begin a new crusade. Further explanation, for the actions of the directors of De Vere Group, can be drawn from stories of the hotel market and the general economy, where external fit and strategic reorientation (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985) demanded a response to the pressures of the competitive environment. From this perspective, the centralisation of Customer Reservations to Warrington, and away from the hotels, can be interpreted as a reaction to environmental cost pressures, brought on by room rate transparency on the internet, internationalisation of travel, and pressure from budget operators. Alternatively, this move to centralise could be interpreted as response to a 'professionalisation' or 'best practice' narrative, as the Directors seek to move De Vere from a loose collection of independent hotels to a streamlined operating group.

The *Shine* story can be read as a continuation of these 'official' organizational narratives, with the Directors of De Vere, supported by outside consultants, bringing together multiple strands of organizational activity, and 'management thinking', to create a coherent story, whose plot provided explanation, and gave permission, for a level of autonomy for hotel General Managers, and their employees, while simultaneously defining boundaries for this freedom. This included the combination of brand positioning, customer segmentation, customer 'touch points' and customer satisfaction data, with corporate values and employees satisfaction data, interpreted through principles of personal development, and the service profit chain. All of this provided a rich 'back story' for the *Shine* strap-line of 'special people creating special experiences', a customer service initiative, aiming to increase repeat business, and improve De Vere returns, one of the four elements of the espoused De Vere Group strategy.

Both De Vere Group and *Shine* 'grand narratives' were curtailed by the takeover of De Vere by AHG, leaving the heroic tale of turning around the "sleepy, unambitious, parochial company" (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 1) either to be concluded as a failed episode or, perhaps, from a shareholder

perspective, one of unexpected early success. The takeover by AHG was an opportunity for management 'sensegiving':

"At times of change, organization members will construct an interpretation of events and of the implications for them (sensemaking). The senior management of an organization cannot prevent this process occurring, but they can seek to have a major influence on the interpretations that are arrived at by presenting their own construction of events (sensegiving)" (Dunford & Jones, 2000: 1208)

AHG set out to shape a new narrative from the start of their tenure, with a meeting for all General Managers, in Bolton, during September 2006. The Grand Harbour General Manager recalled this set AHG as an aggressive company, in his mind, from the outset. This early narrative theme, from which more comprehensive stories were later developed, was shaped at this initial conference, by the explanation of ambitious plans and the underlining of the 'mistakes' of the previous management. The AHG Directors were acting as storytellers, who neither accept nor reject 'reality', yet "instead they seek to mould it, shape it and infuse it with meaning, each in a distinct and individual way" (Gabriel, 1995: 483), and demonstrated sensemaking and storytelling "as instruments of power and hegemony" (Boje et al., 2004: 574).

In my interviewees' stories, this conference in September 2006 appears an isolated event in the conscious creation of a central organizational story, by the AHG Directors, perhaps reflecting the view that "many 'official' organizational stories ... may amount to little more than slogans, virtually drained of meaning and unable to generate emotion" (Gabriel, 2000: 21). However, subsequent 'episodes' of change were perceived as being 'some time coming', and then eventually arrived without an accompanying story to guide employees in placing the events in a consistent organizational narrative. Robinson and Haupe (1986:112) argue "most instances of narrative thinking involve efforts to get from an inadequate story to a complete and convincing story" and, in the absence of a recognisable, 'official' story from AHG, interviewees described the emergence of narratives triggered by the financial



structure of the new privately owned company. The new Directors were positioned as characters interested in money, but not in the business of running hotels. This plausible, but factually untested story, was used by many of the employees and managers interviewed in De Vere, to grant permission to the AHG Directors to legitimately act, as it was their business, but simultaneously set employees in opposition to their new owners by highlighting an essential difference – 'they know money, we know hotels'.

This story was repeated at all levels and locations, and appeared to emerge to fill a perceived 'gap' left by a lack of an AHG sponsored narrative. Operational changes initiated by AHG, for example the removal of General Managers, were not accompanied by an explanation that allowed these decisions to be linked, and to be made sense of in the context of a plan or strategy. One conclusion for managers and employees was that these decisions were not linked, leading to a feeling that the AHG Directors did not know what they were doing, reinforcing the emerging narrative 'they didn't know hotels', and prompting speculation that the future of the organization was being decided 'over a couple of glasses of wine'. Individuals who have more data for sensemaking can cope more effectively with uncertainty (Thomas & McDaniel, 1990; Dutton, 1992) and "are more likely to view change as an opportunity" (Weber & Manning, 2001: 241). While these 'unofficial' stories, generated in the 'unmanaged' organization were governed by plausibility, rather than accuracy, they appeared to fill an important role of in reducing uncertainty and anxiety illustrating how "narratives become a kind of code that transforms uncertain change into something meaningful and comprehensive" (Reissner, 2005: 483).

These stories were not the only narratives changing the organization. At Royal Bath, there was the story of the neglected hotel, a shadow of its former Victorian glory, let down by successive management regimes, unwilling to make the investments needed to restore the hotel to a respected position in the local community. The loss of an AA star rating, from five to four-star, was retold by the hotel management as a positive outcome, perhaps expressing an

acceptance of the new, lower position of the hotel, and confirming the hotels status as a victim of the neglect of the owners. This reflects the pattern of managers assuming a heroic narrative style, with workers adopting a tragic plot form (Beech, 2000). These contrasting narrative styles have been identified elsewhere, where the organizations leaders:

“told a narrative of epic change (in which they cast themselves as adept managers seeking to overcome obstacles with enlightened policies) that was markedly different in structure and tone to the tragic narratives authored by their subordinates (who represented themselves as the victims of flawed strategies with potentially disastrous consequences)” (Brown & Humphreys, 2003: 122).

At Royal Bath, the tragic narratives were temporarily replaced by new hope, through promised investment from AHG, and a new General Manager, understood to be a specialist in hotel refurbishment, only to be disappointed once more, as plans became progressively delayed with the worsening economic climate and below budget performance of the whole business. These stories were not simply descriptive, as (Gabriel, 2000: 116) asserts: “stories do not waft smoothly in an unpolitical textual domain. Instead, as soon as they are uttered, they enter the contestable, unpredictable world of politics”.

These 'official' and organizational stories intertwined with more local concerns, some being used to reinforce arguments for the resolution of long standing employee concerns. The shortage of cutlery at Royal Bath was rectified by the Food Service Manager, citing the impossibility of providing a 'special experience' at breakfast with insufficient spoons unless customers shared, during a busy Sunday service. For a porter at Royal Bath, the frustration of being forbidden to valet park expensive cars following the costly loss of a set of Ferrari keys, reinforced the narrative that managers do not trust their employees, and initiatives, which claim to empower, are merely a front to extract more from employees. Meanwhile, the hotel leadership team at Grand Harbour used the story of the new corporate values, to justify the

delay in recruiting new managers, to replace those having left because of a shift in the organizational narrative regarding what was expected of them.

The intertwining of local concerns and the central organizational narratives appeared to increase the individual connection to these 'official' stories, as employees and managers made sense of their situation, in the context of ongoing changes. As Brown (1998: 52) found:

“narratives ... helped the groups reduce what were often complex and ambiguous events to relatively simple, memorable and plausible accounts which defined significant actors and occurrences, provided causal explanations, and incorporated evaluations of people and outcomes”.

The ‘official’ narrative provided managers and employees with a useful plot to adapt and use (Sims et al., 2009), to justify local action, shaping outcomes consistent with the intended direction of change for De Vere Group, through *Shine*. In the absence of an AHG sponsored narrative, a shared explanation emerged from employee conversations, and acted in a similar way to an ‘official’ story in justifying local action. Sims et al. (2009: 385) argue: “Audiences are more likely to remember interpersonal intrigues, affairs and actions than lengthy descriptions of places they have not been to”. There was considerable flexibility in adapting these broader narratives, so that there was continuity and incremental change in individual stories. These organizational stories were ‘translated’ for local use, rather than ‘diffused’ through De Vere, as Latour elaborates:

“[The] model of diffusion may be contrasted with another, that of the model of translation. According to the latter, the spread in time and space of anything – claims, orders, artifacts, goods – is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it” (Latour, 1986: 267).

It was as if individual narratives act on organizational themes, to smooth out potential discontinuities, for example a new corporate owner, allowing continued performance and psychological stability (Fiol & O’Connor, 2002: 537). The ambiguity is, perhaps, managed by an increased reliance on a focus

on the individual or local group narrative. However, this was described as more difficult to achieve for interviewees, when there was no shared backdrop or accepted 'official' story. For example, when there was no explanation offered for the removal of General Managers after the AHG takeover, managers and employees struggled to identify a pattern to the changes, which appeared to make an 'unofficial' story harder to generate, and left individuals unable to assess the impact on their own situations. This prompted idiosyncratic responses: the General Manager, at Grand Harbour, went to see his financial advisor, and took out more personal insurance; the Revenue Manager at Royal Bath accepted her fate of redundancy, having interpreted the signals she was receiving; and the Food Services Manager at Royal Bath was clearly anxious, and had begun to turn cynical, perhaps in preparation for his perceived inevitable departure.

A complex picture of organizational changes emerges, as organizational grand narratives interact with local stories and individual interpretations. The use of analogy by scholars, therefore, becomes a necessary discursive strategy to communicate the rich textual environment operating in organizations as they adapt and change. This intertwining of stories can take the form of extraction of 'snippets' (Sims et al., 2009) from organizational stories, where they are useful to individual narratives. This process suggests that these stories remain separated, or self-sealed (Beech et al., 2009), with the stories remaining monological. There were examples in De Vere of a dialogue between stories, when managers engaged employees in the organizational story, while seeking to understand their individual narratives. This leadership behaviour is discussed further in section 8.3.4.

### **8.3.3 A Paradox of Change**

A relationship between change and paradox has been suggested by several researchers (e.g. Putnam, 1985; Quinn & Cameron, 1988; Westenholtz, 1993). For example, Brown et al. (2009: 328) assert: "change is a constant at the core of human experience, an inescapable necessity, a paradox, a mystery". Others

have linked paradox to organizational performance, arguing “the excellent companies have learned how to manage paradox” (Peters & Waterman, 1982: 100). Paradox is used freely along side concepts such as dilemma, duality and inconsistency, but the “key characteristic in paradox is the simultaneous presence of contradictory, even mutually exclusive elements” (Cameron & Quinn, 1988: 2). The tension that exists between these contradictory elements has been identified as engendering “the flexibility of thought needed for individual creativity” (Cameron & Quinn, 1988: 5), and thus an instigator of change. Cameron & Quinn (1988: 14) argued paradoxes can be paradoxical, being “both confusing and understandable, common and surprising”.

Throughout my research, I have wrestled with a paradox. The more I looked for paradox in change, the less of it I could find. In the first reading of my transcripts, while coding in NVivo, there appeared a number of paradoxical dimensions. The first example was the need for managers to exert their power through control and at the same time give that power away to enable individual autonomy, which in turn may give them more control. To get control you have to give it away, so both control and no control are simultaneously present – a paradox. As an example, AHG were described as taking more control: telling the hotels to reduce their employment costs and demanding they hire a Food and Beverage Director. Hotel General Managers and Heads of Department complained of having less autonomy. However there also appears to be evidence of less control: there was no prescription as how to reduce payroll costs, and very few Food and Beverage Directors were actually recruited. Can there be both more and less autonomy and control? Another paradox that emerged during my data analysis involved resistance and engagement. Making sense of a change involves challenging your own preconceptions of a situation or approach, to interpret the world in a different way. If this challenge expressed to others, it sounds like resistance rather than engagement, so to resist is to engage - another paradox.

These paradoxical themes felt, at the time, exciting ways to present my interview data. However, the more I searched the less I found. The very things that initially appeared so clear to me in my data, evaporated as I sought to elaborate and articulate them. I reduced the exacting definition of paradox to competing tensions, returned to dualities, thought about binary opposites, and was still unable to satisfactorily represent the data. I was reluctant to leave this idea, as the tension between different polarities, whether they are paradoxical or simply competing opposites, seemed a possible underlying process for change. For example, a shift in the balance of autonomy and control, perhaps, could trigger significant secondary changes in the organization. As I reflect on this now, it feels as if I may have had a desire to create or discover a set of unifying forces, which might give rise to an explanation that I could generalise across other situations. I was, perhaps, attracted to those positivist “glittering stars” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007: 15) of control, prediction, objectivity and generalisability. Possibly, I was reifying concepts such as autonomy, control, resistance, engagement in order to impose an explanation, to gather evidence to ‘prove’ my theory, rather than remembering a “narrative is able to produce generalisations and deep insight without claiming universal status” (Czarniawska, 1999: 16).

In returning to a plurivocal, interpretive, narrative perspective, and my aim to “analyse fragmented and almost living stories, which are ... the currency of organizational communication” (Boje, 2001: 17), it is clear there are going to be contradictory views expressed by interviewees. Therefore, evidence of the coincident presence of contradictory attributes simply reflects different individual interpretations, and different stories, as individual sense is being made of complex situations. Boje (1995: 1000) argues: “the storytelling organization can be a pluralistic construction of a multiplicity of stories, storytellers and story performance events”. Attributing the simultaneous appearance of contradictory perspectives as paradoxical becomes the search for a unifying construct, for something that does not require unification in order for sense to be made. There was nothing paradoxical from the

individual interviewee's point of view; it is only in combination that such an argument could be required to make collective sense of the data. There were tensions between different interpretations of the experience of change. The ongoing negotiation and discussions, between individuals and groups, to reconcile these different views, where a common understanding or agreement was required, may indeed have prompted further alterations in the narrative of change. For this reason "an organizational culture is necessarily a conflicted environment, a site of multiple meanings engaged in a constant struggle for interpretive control" (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993: 137), and the achievement of 'shared meaning' (Witten, 1993).

Making sense of this process of change does not require the overlay of a paradoxical perspective, in addition to a narrative one. As "narrative organizational researchers telling stories of others, we cannot avoid enacting and placing ourselves within those stories" (Cunliffe, Luhman & Boje, 2004: 275), so the challenge becomes capturing the complexity and dynamics of an ever changing, unfolding story, without introducing intellectual paraphernalia that obscures the sense made by those constructing stories of their experience. However, "inevitably it is the author's voice not the research participants', that is most privileged" (Brown, 1998: 40). So if there is a paradox, it is situated in the relationship between the narrator and the story. The more the narrator imposes his or her constructs on the story, in the way "traditional organizational writings tend to synthesise the different voices from the field into one coherent story" (Salzer-Morling, 1998: 113), the more the constructs fail to capture the richness of the story, and yet without the imposition of a framework of the narrators choosing, there is no overall story to tell. The further you look, the less you see.

#### **8.3.4 Defining Organizational Change**

In their review of change theory, Weick and Quinn (1999: 381) begin their conclusion with the contradictory assertion that "change starts with failures to adapt and that change never starts because it never stops". My interviewees

also described their experiences of change as being both episodic and continuous. My initial reading of these notions was as competing ideas, in making sense of change; however, they could be taken as complementary, forming part of the same narrative of change. Perhaps the difficult, and potentially unsettling, act of talking or thinking, about constant movement (Chia, 1999) necessitates the use of episodes of change as a narrative device, even within the conception of change as continuous.

In considering organization as “a symbolic rallying point, or spatial metaphor, that refers neither to a concrete set of social assumptions nor a fixed geographic location, but a discursive space” (Brown, 2006:742), and given stories “may be viewed as constitutive of organizational realities” (Boje, 1998: 1), organizational change becomes the shifts in the conversations, and stories told, by members of the organization. The collection of these shifts into episodes, perhaps marking out more substantial or significant alterations in organizational practice, is not inconsistent with the notion of incremental change. From a literary perspective, we are used to constant plot shifts, and incremental development of the characters, through their actions and learning. Yet we also expect these changes to sit within episodes or chapters, helping us make sense of critical parts of the story. As Weick and Quinn argue:

“From a distance (the macro level of analysis), when observers examine the flow of events that constitute organizing, they see what looks like repetitive action, routine, and inertia dotted with occasional episodes of revolutionary change. But a view from closer in (the micro level of analysis) suggests ongoing adaptation and adjustment. Although these adjustments may be small, they also tend to be frequent and continuous across units, which means they are capable of altering structure and strategy” (Weick & Quinn, 1999: 362).

The complementary nature of these notions of change was illustrated by *Shine*. The *Shine* events were an important instigator of discussion, interpretation, and telling of change stories within De Vere. The intensity of the reinterpretation of existing storylines in De Vere increased, and the narrative of *Shine* shaped these discussions. The *Shine* event acted like a stone



creating ripples through a pool. However, the organizational pool is not a smooth, calm, summer pond, but a choppy sea, in which the ripples from the stone of change are diverted, strengthened and dissipated by waves of ongoing adaptation. As Gabriel (1995: 495) argues “stories in the unmanaged organization are far more plastic than those embedded in official mythologies, and have a strong tendency to mutate into other stories and merge with them.” This alteration of the organizational narrative takes place as members interact with each other and with external stakeholders, in the case of *Shine*, most notably with customers, with each conversation subtly shifting the sense made of the organization. It was not the adoption of a new corporate ownership structure, from De Vere Group Plc to the private ownership of AHG, that constituted a change in the organization, but in the stories that were perpetuated from this, as managers and employees sought to make sense, and to attribute meaning to subsequent events, by placing what happened into their personal version of the organization’s story. This individual story in turn is influenced by others’ stories, creating a patchwork quilt (Brown, 2006) of new stories, which collectively constitute the organization’s identity.

The control over interpretive ambiguity is often manipulated to support the interests of management (Eisenberg, 1984), and the actions of the leaders of De Vere can be interpreted through this narrative understanding of change. The De Vere Chief Executive expected change to follow the pattern implied by this narrative perspective, following his initiation of *Shine*, which he saw as a one-off event, as “you can only launch something once” (T2: 7). He also accepted the diversity of approach the managers in his business would take:

“you’re not going to get carbon copy leaders, especially in a retail-like environment, where your people are your products. Your products, it’s not a tin of beans coming off the production line, it’s a very personal interaction that, by its nature is unique in every situation” (De Vere Group Chief Executive, T2: 9)

The General Manager at Grand Harbour was the best exemplar of a leader’s behaviour consistent with this definition of organizational change. He was

frequently engaged with all levels of staff, seeking to shape and influence the storylines developed, not only through staged events, but by creating the opportunity for a discussion, whenever possible. His interactions ranged from conversing with housekeepers about new vacuum cleaners, to persuading his Housekeeping Supervisor not to leave her job. This high degree of consultation may explain why the General Manager at Grand Harbour found the lack of discussion with his new AHG bosses so difficult to handle, expecting them to treat him in the way treated others. He was not alone and, with support from the Human Resources Manager and the Operations Manager, there were alterations, consistent with *Shine*, made to the discussions that were had, for example, on individual under performance. The stories that were then told, and retold, by other managers and employees at the hotel, shifted expectations through an adjustment to individual narratives on performance and its consequences.

One noticeable difference for interviewees, of these leadership behaviours, was the increased emphasis on teamwork, and supporting colleagues across departmental boundaries. While being translated (Latour, 1986) in the daily interactions of managers and employees, these were strong messages in the *Shine* story that had 'rippled' through the organization, and created change consistent with the espoused corporate value of 'One team, pulling together'. It was through managers' respect for individuals' stories, while simultaneously engaging their employees in the organizational narrative of *Shine*, as exemplified by the Grand Harbour General Manager, that consistent change was promoted. This leadership behaviour prevented the self-sealing of stories, where "although there were multiple story strands, each group did not hear the stories of the others" (Beech et al., 2009: 348), and created the possibility of dialogical stories that entail openness, alternatives, criticism and self-criticism (Shotter, 2006). The Grand Harbour General Manager demonstrated the impact of 'witness', not 'aboutness', thinking (Shotter, 2006) in engaging his employees with his storytelling approach, and bringing about continuous organizational change.

## **8.4 AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC READING**

### **8.4.1 The Importance of My Story**

As Anderson (2006: 375) comments “there has always been an autoethnographic element in qualitative sociological research”, however, up until the 1960/70s this was restricted to “confessional tales” of fieldwork experiences (Van Maanen, 1988), when there were notable examples of experimenting with self-observation and analysis (Wallace, 1965; Sudnow, 1978; Hayno, 1979; Zurcher, 1983: 239-65). Janesick (1998: 41) contends that “by identifying ones biases one can easily see where the questions that guide the study are crafted” and this is the aim of this reading. In writing we are ordering experience so researchers need to “be asking how it is that we came to (try to) order in the way that we did” (Law, 1994b: 17). Denzin (2006: 422) makes the argument for recognising the presence of the researcher in the research more forcefully:

“Ethnography is not an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political. Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study. These performances are messy and pedagogical. They instruct our readers about this world and how we see it.”

Atkinson et al. (2003: 62) assert that for autoethnographers: “their ethnographic data are situated within their personal experience and sense making. They themselves form part of the representational processes in which they are engaging and are part of the story they are telling”. This brings reflexivity to the fore, which “entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand self and others through examining one’s actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others” (Anderson, 2006: 382). Schwalbe (1996: 58) reflected on the experience of ethnography, concluding that “every insight was both a doorway and a mirror – a way to see into their experience and a way to look back at mine.” Therefore “the ethnographer is thoroughly implicated in the phenomena that he or she documents” (Atkinson, 2006: 402) and “autoethnographers should illustrate analytic insights through recounting their own experiences and thoughts as

well as those of others” (Anderson, 2006: 384). This focus on the researcher, however, must not be at the expense of the central purpose “of the ethnographic imperative that we are seeking to understand and make sense of complex social worlds of which we are only part (but a part nevertheless)” (Atkinson et al., 2003: 57).

This section is a reading of my research from an autoethnographic perspective, as I recount my own experiences and consider their impact on the story I have told. Initially I have reflected on the ‘doorways’ I have created into my own experience, in section 7.4.2, which appear as vignettes interwoven within this thesis. This represents the element of my story that I have chosen to make visible, and is followed, in section 7.4.3, by part of my story that is hidden throughout the research. I have used my file notes to recount the story of my construction of my data presentation chapters, in order to make accessible the thought process that has shaped my choices. The final section (7.4.4) concludes my overall story of change.

#### **8.4.2 The ‘Visible’ Story**

The most easily accessible insight into my story, and the change I was experiencing while completing this research project, comes in the vignettes presented throughout this thesis (Humphreys, 1999). In the sequence they appear, the vignettes share my reflections on (1.1) my transfer examination, (3.1) memorable interviews, (4.1) and (4.2) my first impressions of Grand Harbour and Royal Bath, (5.1) my interview with the former General Manager of Royal Bath, after he had been fired, (6.1) my concerns for the future of my research following the AHG takeover, (7.1) the General Manager of Grand Harbour, not his usual self, (7.2) preparing the Chief Executive, for a video shoot, and (8.1) writing my discussion chapter. They were typically constructed during the writing of each section, and drew on file notes made at the time, with the exception of vignette 1.1 in the introduction, which was written during the completion of my discussion based my notes of my transfer examination. The chronology of the content of the vignettes, however, is as

follows: (1.1) January 2008; (3.1) May 2006 to November 2007; (4.1) May 2006; (4.2) May 2006; (5.1) March 2007; (6.1) Summer 2006 to January 2007; (7.1) November 2007; (7.2) August 2005 and (8.1) February 2010. These vignettes are, therefore, mainly retrospective accounts of my experience, even when written in the present tense.

The first thing I noticed in reading the nine vignettes, as a set, was the presence of anxiety throughout, even though I do not think of my experience over the last five years as a particularly worrying time. Perhaps these were simply the most memorable, or maybe reflected my connection to a particular response to change, one referred to by my interviewees. What seemed to have changed, over the course of my research, was my behaviour in facing situations that caused me to concern. In the later vignettes, I appeared less paralysed by my fear of either doing, or being, 'wrong'. Rather than being 'frozen', as in vignette 6.1, I chose to move forward as a way to work to a conclusion, a process in which I am engaged now, as I write this discussion chapter, creating what Czarniawska terms a 'literary collage' or "a compilation of texts authored by practitioners, theoreticians, and the author her- or himself" (Czarniawska, 1999: 24).

The vignettes also differ in reflexivity. The early stories focus on something I was doing, for example, worrying about adopting a different style as a researcher rather than a consultant, in vignette 4.1. In vignette 6.1, I recognised the shifts and changes in myself, notably the anxieties about being able to continue with this line of research, whereas in vignette 8.1, I described the interplay between my own thoughts and their impact on my interpretation of others' stories, as I drew parallels between my personal change experience and the organizational change described. This interaction between my own altering thoughts and the stories of change, told by my interviewees, was also in evidence in my file notes and is explored in the next section.

### 8.4.3 The 'Hidden' Story

#### **A thought went up my mind today**

Emily Dickinson

A thought went up my mind today  
That I have had before,  
But did not finish, - some way back,  
I could not fix the year,

Nor where it went, or why it came  
The second time to me,  
Nor definitely what it was,  
Have I the art to say.

But somewhere in my soul, I know  
I've met the thing before;  
It reminded me – 'twas all –  
And came my way no more

My hidden story recounts the emergence of the structure, and focus, of my data presentation chapter, a process, captured beautifully by Emily Dickinson, of surfacing my own thoughts through the organization of the data, with the complex inter-relationship between my ideas and the stories told by my interviewees. As Brown (1998: 35) argues, the use of a narrative approach "is valuable because it facilitates recognition of the extent to which interpretive research involves the creation and ascription of meaning in ways that require authorial reflexivity". This emergent process is illustrated throughout my file notes, describing the progression of my data presentation chapters, during the fourth year of my research, from July 2008 to July 2009. The story begins as I am facing 67 transcripts, comfortably filling four box files on my office self, wondering how to make a start.

From the outset, I was troubled by the extent to which I was putting my own construction of the world onto the stories of my interviewees:

"In looking for commonality across interviews am I not simply highlighting my biases – I am the common feature - though the participants all share an organizational context which is also common? How do I see what is me and what is them? Or is there not 'a me' or 'them', simply what I produce in my interaction with the material

(produced from my interaction with them at the interview). Can this ever be anything more than an idiosyncratic piece of art?" (File note: 1 July 2008).

I was aware that I was not alone in my concerns, and had inserted the following quotation, in bold type, into my notes: 'Theme and taxonomy ... is a terrorist discourse, an analysis reduced to stereotypes ... a foreclosure on storytelling polysemy and a debasement of living exchange' (Boje, 2001: 122). Faced with these anxieties my usual path was to one of the many University cafes and my supervisor, Professor Andrew Brown. Following a meeting with Andrew on 4 July 2008, I had calmed down somewhat, and identified a clear question to answer, which helped me overcome my initial worries and to begin the task of coding my interviews in NVivo: "What are the few dualities which will most enable me to say something interesting about organizational change and enable me to bridge from literature review to discussion?" (File note: 4 July 2008). However, it wasn't long before my old anxieties surfaced again, my entry after coding the first transcript, with 37 nodes and 87 references, explained:

"Struck once again by how much of a 'leap of faith' is required in the process. It was similar during my literature review. Have to have a sense of direction and head that way, working it out as you go. While I can intellectually accept this, and it is very consistent with a 'no single right way' of an interpretive view, it still comes with some anxiety – why am I so prone to want to do it the 'right' way? I checked in with Andrew in order to manage the anxiety. He encouraged me to continue coding - 'carry on coding' a missed opportunity for schoolboy humour surely" (File note: 14 July 2008).

### **Vignette 8.1 – Gaining Confidence**

As I write this discussion chapter in February 2010, I am once more into the anxiety of not knowing where I am going, perhaps still searching for the 'right way', but increasingly comfortable with articulating what I am thinking, and shaping my writing from there. I have spent the past few days typing my thoughts under my first set of headings, building a picture of what I want to say. I have then been returning to these early tentative thoughts, reordering, bringing new insight, and from that, some sense is emerging. It also feels, as I write, as if this process is analogous to

experiencing organizational change; a constantly unfolding as sense is being made through action, towards an ambiguous and uncertain future. The De Vere Organization Development Manager described the circular nature of change in De Vere as setting off down one path before being asked, half way through, to head off in another direction. The similarity of what I have had to learn about approaching my research work, in allowing the story to emerge as I go, and the stories told of organizational change, is striking. Both have reflexivity at their heart, and portray a continuous, never ending process of creation and adaptation, through which learning takes place. This perspective reframes my thesis as a snapshot of a moment in time, a story that will never be finished, for it will continue to change with each subsequent reading. The idea that this document is simply a 'freeze frame' of a continually changing process of thought and discussion, a material manifestation point, is helpful in letting go of seeking the right answer, or even there being one to find.

Back in 2008, the impact of doing this research on a part-time basis was evident in my notes, with the rhythm and consistency of thought constantly interrupted, I wrote: "Life has continued to get in the way of coding. I have been edging forward, but the lapses of time make progress slow – reconnecting with an ever growing list of categories" (File note: 13 October 2008). However, progress was being made and the moments of confusion were interspersed with exciting glimpses of clarity:

"[Andrew and I] discussed some possible structures and reviewed a couple of other PhDs. Keep it simple, seems to be the lesson. Provide a structure that allows me to tell a plausible, engaging story of my research. At its heart is the question of the major themes, or paradoxes, or contradictions. I was all at sea in trying to articulate these or respond to suggestions from Andrew. I felt I was still stuck in the deconstructive mode of my coding. Unable to see the wood for the trees.

Lay awake the other morning. Kate [my wife] had got up for Nell's early feed [my daughter born on 10 August 2008], and I was mentally starting to see the wood, rather than the trees. Over breakfast I was scribbling, possible paradoxes – leadership, power and control; change as an event or continuous; resistance – something to be overcome or to be encouraged as a sign of engagement. Worried they might be too broad and too 'overused'. However, they sit together well. Either ends of the paradox seem to sit well together. At the rational, positivist end:



power as the legitimate domain of leaders, change as an event, resistance to be overcome. At the interpretive end: Power (unevenly) distributed throughout, change a continuous and ever present phenomenon, resistance reframed as an expression of interest and engagement...

Think it might be time to have another chat with Andrew...

Talked to him. He says go for it! Liked the themes, mainstream, but can be delivered with a twist. Paradox might be that twist" (File note: 25 November 2008).

The influence of my supervisor, Andrew, is brought to life through these file notes. He has been a significant influence on my thinking and another 'hidden voice' in this thesis. That is not to say that Andrew has ever told me to do one thing over another, even in his most exasperated moments, he has remained a facilitator and guide to my work. However, he has been the only person I have been able to discuss my thinking with regularly, and it, therefore, seems natural that I have come to see the narrative approach in broadly similar way to Andrew. I have obviously read others' perspectives, and can understand and identify with them, but attending several conferences is not a fair counterbalance for regular one-to-one discussion over a latte.

Throughout the year several metaphors for the process I was in presented themselves and helped me to manage the inherent uncertainty of the activity:

"Been working through writing the first version of the data presentation, only based on the coding done so far. It feels an almost artistic process. Starting with an idea or the fragment of an idea, then looking for quotes that might be relevant, might flesh out the idea. Putting these down on the 'canvas' and then trying to work them into the idea, both explaining the idea and creating it simultaneously. It really strikes me the fluidity of the process and how it must be reliant on my unconscious to be spotting links and interpretations. That way it has to be a form of self portrait! It also underlines the interpretive nature of the whole process.

...some parallels between the PhD and my consulting process, linking on from the idea of self portrait – the move from unknowing to knowing, and the perceived need for the consultant to provide certainty, whereas this in practice can be a block to the clients learning

and lasting change. Same applied here – the need to be able to progress through the transcripts without knowing where the work is heading. The need is ‘just enough’ certainty to be confident to progress, while allowing ‘a picture’ to emerge out of the uncertainty...

Enjoying painting with words” (File note: 16 December 2008).

The path was not always smooth:

“Back after a Christmas break. Andrew has emailed me expressing his concern over progress. Re-reading my first pass at the data presentation chapters, I am overcomplicating things. I am trying to have too much structure; I don’t need to plan to cut the data in so many ways. It’ll be hard to code and hard to read!

Think I am going to attempt some rapid coding. I need to get more quickly into the themes that are in the data. I am there for going to code transcripts (prior to final proofing) into 4 big buckets – storyline, leadership, change and resistance. At the same time I will pull out relevant ‘whole stories’” (File note: 19 January 2009).

The concern of interfering with the emergence my story of stories of change was made even more acute, following further reading of the literature on paradox and change. I was particularly interested in a model proposed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983):

“I am concerned that I will be force fitting a model to my data. However, what ever I do I will be doing that, it is just how explicit or implicit the model is. Picking up on things that I notice is simply applying my implicit map of the world. Is it any different to utilise an existing framework? All I am attempting to do is to present the data in an interesting way that says something about change” (File note: 5 May 2009).

I was easily distracted from writing by other seemingly worthwhile activities:

“Re-read my literature review yesterday – wanted to make sure that I am bringing to the fore issues raised in the data, so that I can tie the two together in the discussion. It was a really useful primer and a reminder that I am fundamentally looking to keep the messiness in and perhaps I have been looking for a neat organiser unnecessarily. Yet again simplification seems the order of the day – I seem to want to impose an elaborate structure, rather than have it emerge from the data...

Ok enough procrastination...” (File note: 7 May 2009).

A pattern seemed to be emerging, significant progress came from having the confidence to suspend my anxieties and to write, and then to be able to stand back, often with Andrew's help, in order to assess progress, and to see a new way forward. My psychological need to 'be right' seemed to galvanise action when I had 'gone wrong', so once again significant progress was preceded by a difficult conversation. At the time I wrote:

"I had my chapter back from Andrew yesterday, with some significant concerns. I had been struggling on a number of fronts:

1. How to structure a story without intervening in it – allowing the interviewees to speak for themselves is quite difficult. The quotes need linking and recontextualising and this can easily lead to me overly expressing my views. (Of course my views are at least implicit as I am providing the overarching structure).
2. The paradox is 'logically' present, but is 'lost' or 'transparent' in the sense making that is done by people. So they don't necessarily see the paradox – so does it exist for them or only for me. If it is only for me then it is debateable that I can claim this as emerging from my data.
3. Was power the right organiser? This is definitely related to power, but should I be more specific in the nature of my focus.

Andrew confirmed most of these fears!" (File note: 1 June 2009):

"A week on from the feedback and I have just submitted the next version to Andrew. I have found myself forming a stronger narrative for each section, more flow from quote to quote. I have taken the idea of the competing pressures of autonomy and control and explored how this are articulated in key relationships (central to hotel, AHG to De Vere, Managers to employees). I am left with the strong feeling as the author of how much control I have over the edit – the picture that is presented is mine, even though I am going out of my way to phrase it as coming from the data" (File note: 7 June 2009).

It was through this process of imperfect forward movement, followed by reflection and revision that the data presentation chapters began to near completion. A final metaphor summed up the experience:

"In my conversations with Andrew the metaphor of clay modelling has emerged. There is a need to take the raw clay (the transcripts) and produce the initial pot shape before you can begin to finesse material to create a finished article. My chapters are definitely only simple pots

and there are many ways they can be finessed. The emergent nature of this process feels very genuine. Without the initial work (creating the pot) I was in no position to even conceive of or see the need or type of finessing required. This is both within and between chapters as I am now starting to see new links and challenge my initial conceptions of how these chapters might combine into a coherent whole. This is also occurring across the whole PhD...

On with shaping the pot! I think this data is even more fragmented than the other chapters so I am going to progressively code it and see what emerges as there are no obvious all encompassing categories” (File note: 1 July 2009).

This new found confidence in approach enabled me to progress steadily through the remaining data presentation chapters over the balance of 2009, in spite of a large work project interfering. However, in February 2010, while preparing for my discussion and reading back through my presentation chapters, I finally dropped the paradoxical structure of my data presentation chapters, reframing them more simply as stories of organizational change, responses to change and power, control and autonomy.

#### **8.4.4 My Story of Change**

My story of change in retrospect marks out a number of shifts in perspective and identity. I started this project as much more of a novice researcher than I realised at the time. While there are some parallels with my other qualifications, and my work as a consultant, I have come to understand the difference between having appropriate knowledge or skills, and to identify with, and live, the role of a narrative researcher. The change in understanding and approach is fundamental, and has been told in narrative form throughout this thesis, but in particular in this autoethnographic reading and it feels this thesis has had many different authors, a term that does “not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves” (Foucault, 1984: 113). My story of change has involved: confronting positivist perspectives, which I thought I had left behind with my Engineering Degree; changing my consulting practice, which had become inconsistent with my new identity; and seeing life through a new lens. While I still have much to

learn, I now identify with the narrative perspective, and I am working through the implications of this for future research, work and life.

## 8.5 CONCLUSION

In writing the discussion chapter I have been wrestling with the ethnographer's challenge of "finding the story that best represents the case" (Stake, 1995: 93). In presenting three different readings, I have focused my attention on the importance of reflexivity, voice, plurivocity, temporality and fictionality (Brown, 2006: 731). Throughout the discussion, I have reinforced the value and importance of a continuous change perspective, from which:

"the real challenge is to maintain any sense of continuity of meaning in an ever changing social reality. Adopting an organizational becoming perspective implies that sense-making is pervasive and central, rather than an important but occasional activity triggered by discrete change events" (Pierano-Vejo & Stablein, 2009: 445).

The case study has shown that this 'pervasive sense-making' is influenced by the sense-giving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) of senior managers, whether or not they develop explicit stories, such as *Shine*, to influence how employees interpret their actions. The absence of a story can be telling, as was demonstrated during the AHG takeover. The different stories told by interviewees regarding *Shine*, demonstrated how sense can be taken, rather than made, by managers and employees extracting parts of this organizational story to fit their own narratives. The extent to which meaning was taken from the senior managers' sense-giving depended on the sense-making requirements of the listener, often to match the complexity of their role or situation. This meant simple snippets (Sims et al., 2009) to reinforce existing understandings for some, or for others, full stories, with beginnings, middles and ends.

Stories were an effective vehicle for this sense-taking, being simultaneously both clear and ambiguous, as Sims et al. (2009: 386) assert:

"stories being told are thus ambiguous, multiplicitous and disguised, while sometimes being admired by the audience for their clarity,

singularity and openness. Their very ambiguity was needed to enable the 'learning' which was a process of reimagining and recycling snippets".

The well articulated narrative of *Shine* appeared, to most managers and employees, to tell a single, monological, managerial story. It did this through comprehensively argued and presented tellings, giving it the requisite plausibility to be accepted as credible by its audiences. However, the core message of *Shine*, promoting employees' autonomy, masked an increase in management control. Autonomy was used, by the senior managers in De Vere, as a strategy for management control. While the notion of sense-taking implies receivers have agency to take from the managerial monologue what they need, in many instances at De Vere, managers and employees, took the sense intended by their managers. They wore their Shining Stars with pride, and enjoyed the perceived increased autonomy, typically remaining oblivious to the increased controls placed upon them.

The discussion of the case study suggests this listener-centric sense-taking may be a factor in stories becoming 'self-sealed', with each employee taking and using their own version, or component parts, to maintain the continuity of their own personal narrative. In De Vere, leaders' behaviour was significant in creating dialogue, and intertwining individuals' stories with the organizational narrative. Beech et al. (2009: 350) argue:

"opening up dialogue might be one way of challenging self-sealing stories, and so witness dialogue should not mean that we tell one story, but that we have ways of accessing the alternative stories that make us uncomfortable"

Managers adopting a 'witness' approach and engaging with stories that make them uncomfortable, requires an acceptance of the legitimacy of different interpretations and constructions of the world, as in a narrative perspective. Adopting an interpretive approach to leadership necessitates reflexivity from managers, in order that they recognise their constructions as only one of many possible. There were examples in the case study of genuine dialogue between

managers and employees, which led to the adaptation of organizational and personal stories, and thereby, organizational change.

This chapter has also demonstrated a potential mis-match in our language of change, with many terms in common use a legacy from a positivist perspective. Concepts such as 'stability', 'paradox' and 'episodic' enable particular kinds of explanations in which discrepancies are reconciled. In taking a narrative approach, the need for this process of reconciliation disappears. Individual stories are 'contained' within narrative themes, within which contradictions remain without resolution. From an organizational becoming perspective, the notion of episodic change becomes an explanatory device in the ongoing, "pervasive and central" (Pierano-Vejo & Stablein, 2009: 445) sensemaking, and, during my data analysis and presentation, the concept of paradox became unnecessary for telling the story. This is not to suggest that the adoption of this approach is without difficulties, and possible limitations of this methodology are discussed further in section 9.3.2

Researcher reflexivity has been a strong theme through this thesis. There are parallels between my own experience and that described by managers and employees in De Vere. Now, I believe seeking the 'right' answers to the problems of a complex, ambiguous world, is a naive endeavour, which, at best, will reproduce the performance of the past. Yet this approach is in evidence in this case study, my own consulting experience, and in my own approach to this thesis. Perhaps the General Manager at Grand Harbour provides a role model for how to behave. He was unclear as to exactly where he was going, but moved forward with a strong sense of himself, and engaged everyone in his hotel in dialogue around his interpretation of the organization's narratives, and each employee's personal stories. He stopped regularly, accepted his mistakes, and adjusted his approach. He was, perhaps, demonstrating how to use our "conception of organizational reality as being a useful fiction that we use to guide our understanding of activities and events" (Rhodes, 2001: 50).

## **9. CONCLUSIONS**

### **9.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter draws together the themes of this thesis, and presents my concluding thoughts. Firstly, in summarising the arguments, I have presented a 'reading of the readings' (9.2), before explicitly describing the contributions of this research, empirically and theoretically (9.3.1), methodologically (9.3.2) and, finally, practically (9.3.3). In such a study, there are always areas that have arisen during the course of the research that have not been pursued or developed further. Section 9.4 presents these limitations and suggests areas for further research. I have ended my thesis on a personal note, with a final reflexive comment.

### **9.2 A READING OF THE READINGS**

In my introduction to the Discussion chapter, I drew attention to the level of interpretation undertaken prior to my three readings. This section represents a further interpretation of those readings, continuing the 'Russian Doll' effect of stories within stories, within yet further stories. These multiple levels of storytelling highlight an important capability for "narrative approaches to organizations is the ability to write knowledge whilst at the same time drawing attention to the fact that the knowledge is written" (Rhodes, 2001: 32). In section 8.4, an autoethnographic reading, I have taken the view that "it becomes far more important for appreciating the human condition to understand the ways human beings construct their worlds" (De Cock 2000: 590). The parallels between my own learning experience during the research and the descriptions of change, co-created through the interviews and subsequent data presentation, has raised questions for both the contributions and limitations of this thesis. Do the recurring patterns of 'progress through anxiety', for example, represent a consistent feature of change, be it personal or organizational, or have I simply imposed my own responses too strongly on the interview data? Moreover, how would I know which of these were 'true'? The concept of truth is difficult within the interpretive, narrative perspective.



With all stories “compounds of happenings and imaginings” (Sarbin, 1986: 12), I have produced, at least in part, a fictional account of change in De Vere. This does not diminish the value of the thesis, as Robinson and Haupe (1986: 111-112) assert: “everyday stories are not fictions, or rather, they are no more fictional than any other product of thought such as concepts, since abstraction, schematization and inference are part of any cognitive act”. Fictionality (Brown, 2006) is an unavoidable and necessary feature of all storytelling, and as much a contribution as a limitation. I have told the story of change that represented the intersections of the interviewees’ stories, the literature on narrative and organizational change, and my own learning journey. By making each of these influences as explicit as possible, I have created the opportunity for the reader to develop the story further, in their interaction with the text.

My story of De Vere is a reflection of the messy, complex nature of a plurivocal telling of the experiences of change. I have identified storylines, plots and characterisations within the data, and used these to provide a readable, coherent account. I have chosen to place in the foreground the comparison between the ‘official’ storytelling associated with *Shine*, and the apparent lack of narration by AHG Directors following their acquisition of De Vere. Another theme described has been the shifts in power during change, in particular the way in which leaders narrate the encouragement of autonomy, while simultaneously retaining control, a storyline prevalent between organizational groups, such as head office and individual hotels, as well as between specific leaders and their managers and employees. The constructed story also includes less prominent threads such as the stability of employees’ identity narratives with the hotel in which they work, rather than the more fluid association with the organizational parent, perhaps reflecting a narrative continuity that reduces their uncertainty of changes in corporate ownership.

I could have made these, and other, themes into stronger stories, and excluded some of the diversity of view. The result may have been a more

compelling narrative flow and, perhaps, a more clear set of conclusions. However, this was not my experience of the interviews and discussions I had with the managers and employees of De Vere. Had I been producing a consultancy report, where the emphasis was on providing clear, incontestable advice on how to proceed, I would have ignored the dissenting voices, the possible sub-plots or alternative interpretations. In this thesis, I have set out to 'keep in' the complexity and have sacrificed some readability in the process. I have chosen to focus on how I have influenced the choices of stories to be told, as "it is the process of construction that is interesting rather than the constructs themselves" (Czarniawska, 1997: 63). This potential lack of coherence in my data presentation, as I have attempted to represent the diversity of voices, raises possible limitations of this representational strategy, which are discussed in section 9.4. I have, however, achieved my primary aim of telling a complex, plurivocal story of the experiences of planned and unplanned processes of change, and made an empirical, theoretical and practical contribution.

### **9.3 CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH**

#### **9.3.1 Empirical and Theoretical Contribution**

This thesis makes contributions to research on narrative, organizational change, reflexivity and on the intersections between these three discourses. There has only been limited application of a narrative approach to the domain of organizational change (e.g. Organization Special Issue – Storytelling and Change, 16(3)). My primary contribution is empirical, in providing an in-depth case study, analysing the complexities of change, and making available a plurivocal account for other researchers and practitioners. My telling of the De Vere change story, in a way that renders explicit my own biases, for example the autoethnographic reading (8.4), has also contributed empirically to the reflexivity literature.

I have made a further contribution through the application of narrative and organizational change theory to my in-depth case study. The case of De Vere

has demonstrated the role of stories in sensemaking during change, with managers and employees incorporating both 'official' and 'unofficial' narratives into their own organizational story, to the degree of complexity required for sense to be made of their situations. By deconstructing the espoused messages in *Shine* promoting employee autonomy, I have illustrated the multiple interpretations inherent in a single story; in this case, the use of narratives of employee freedom of choice to exercise greater managerial control. This reinforces the importance of ambiguity in stories to support sense-taking (Sims et al., 2009), as well as the influence of senior management 'sense-giving' (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) in shaping organizational storytelling. The function of maintaining stability and continuity played by stories of organizational identity has been highlighted, and the strength of resistance initiated, when these are challenged. I have discussed the significance of managers engaging in 'witness' thinking, in order to promote genuine dialogue and to prevent stories 'self-sealing' (Beech et al., 2009). This is developed further in section 9.3.3 on Practical Contributions.

In taking the perspective that "both organizing and organization are provisional and impermanent; and organizations are in a continuous process of becoming, rather than a stable state" (Vince, 2002: 1191), this thesis adds to the understanding of change as continuous, rather than as a shift from one stable state to another, which has often been described as a variation on Lewin's (1947) 'unfreezing, moving, refreezing'. This approach has further illustrated the difficulties in describing movement (Chia, 1999) and continual adaptation. Much of our language on change has positivist roots, and can hinder the telling of compelling stories. I have questioned the division by Weick and Quinn (1999) of the literature into the competing notions of episodic and continuous change, suggesting that these conceptions can be complementary in constructing change narratives. I have examined paradox as a process of change, finding the need to reconcile the simultaneous presence of contradictory ideas unnecessary within a narrative frame, with

members' stories holding competing concepts without difficulty for the storyteller.

Finally, I have added to the debate on the definition of narrative, in particular the impact of removing stories from the context of their telling. My acceptance of all utterances, however terse (Boje, 1995), has enabled me to tell a plurivocal story of the complexities change. The need to combine this approach with a reflexive account has been illustrated through my own reflections on completing my thesis. Through the presentation of a plurivocal case study, and the application of narrative and organizational change theory, I have added further elaboration to the organizational landscape in which change takes place, with managerial change initiatives, such as *Shine*, battling for attention with everyday alterations in organizational life.

### **9.3.2 Methodological Contribution**

Brown (1980: 548) asserted that science "has emerged as a kind of religion, an ultimate frame of reference for what is real and true"; the methodological approach of a narrative perspective challenges many of the positivist ideals that have been prevalent both in research and practice. I have contributed a further case study, which is "conforming to [the] dominant rules" (Czarniawska, 1999: 27) of a narrative approach, to begin to redress the balance towards a qualitative approach to research into organizational change.

Adopting a narrative methodology requires significant skills on behalf of the researcher, including effective storytelling; a capability that Gabriel (2000: 15) has argued is in decline through "narrative deskilling", as stories have been placed in opposition to fact and in subordination to science (Gabriel, 1998). Self-awareness and the ability to write reflexively are also essential for successful use of this methodology. The approach is, therefore, unavoidably intertwined with the researcher's ability to learn, and through completing this research, I have adapted my sense of self and identification with the role of narrative researcher. The methodology has made a significant contribution to

my learning, and that simultaneously has contributed to the demonstration of the efficacy of the narrative approach for studying change.

### 9.3.3 Practical Contribution

There are two forms of contribution to practice and to practitioners. Most importantly, this thesis addresses the concern that when “it comes to practice, people are not conscious of the action theories they are applying” (Czarniawska, 1999: 7). From this perspective Czarniawska clarifies the task of the researcher:

“to free practitioners from the ‘iron cage’ – from the trap that the world they have constructed for themselves has become for them. By convincing them that it does not exist ‘out there’ objectively and immutably, but that it is constructed by people in a joint effort, the researcher can also persuade them that other constructions are possible” (Czarniawska, 1999: 9).

Other scholars (e.g. Orlikowski & Hofman, 1997; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Tsoukas & Papoulias, 2005) have described adopting the role of ‘reflective practitioner’ as bestowing agency to individuals, who may exercise it in ways that suit their own interests or views of the workplace. As Tsoukas (2005: 100-101) argues this reflexivity “creates momentum to change programs and makes change a continuing process rather than an episodic event.” This thesis has demonstrated the value to practitioners of the notion of change as continuous, and highlights the adoption of an interpretive perspective as a way of promoting this approach.

Secondly, the thesis offers practitioners insights into the value of adopting storytelling perspective while seeking to operate in a changing organization. The stories told about *Shine* and the AHG takeover, offer the practitioner possible advice on the role of ‘official’ narratives in change, especially the effectiveness of a ‘well-told’ story in influencing the sense taken by employees. There is also specific insight, in the case study, into the role of leaders during change. The leadership approach, described at Grand Harbour, followed the almost trite assertion that leaders should be visible, and engage

their employees. Understanding organizational change from a narrative perspective, frames the purpose of these organizational conversations very specifically.

Within De Vere, the most effective leaders' interactions were seeking to connect with the story of each individual, recognising its unique qualities, and at the same time linking this story to collective narratives of the organization. This dialogue was either to increase collective identity, or to support a specific performance related challenge. The narrative perspective clarifies the purpose of these interactions between managers and employees, and highlights their limitations. For instance, the goal of 'alignment', with everyone in the organization interpreting and telling a single story, was an objective of the De Vere Group Human Resources Director (T4: 6). From a narrative perspective, this could be interpreted as both unrealistic and unnecessary. Even if achieved, alignment would be lost in the next storytelling, as the flow of interpretation continued. Rather than alignment, a more useful notion of the leadership challenge in organizational change may be to achieve connection to the 'official story', in a way that recognises and respects the complexity of individual employee interpretations.

The thesis, as a rich story, has many such insights for practitioners, including the recognition that a strong reaction to a new story may be a natural part of sensemaking. This may allow resistance to change to be reframed by practitioners more positively, recognising "resistance is an interpretation given by an observer to a particular event or circumstance and is not, therefore, some 'thing' to be overcome" (Ford & Ford, 1994: 777). In short, a narrative perspective provides a way to understand the inherent ambiguity and complexity of organizational change for both scholars and practitioners. The acceptance of the plurivocal nature of organizational life and the adoption of an interpretive, narrative perspective may enable practitioners to escape from the 'iron cage' of their own construction.

#### **9.4 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

Having adopted the perspective that stories “are not just enactments of different people’s opinions or perspectives, but rather they are part of an unknowable web of meaning that is always in flux and can never be captured and finalised in a written text” (Rhodes, 2001: 31), attempting to tell a coherent and conclusive story will always have limitations. The narrative I have constructed has been one based on my interpretation of the stories told by my interviewees. Given the rich, complex nature of these stories, I could have chosen many different plots to develop, or characters to foreground. A different researcher would have co-created different stories during the interviews, and constructed a different narrative in presenting them. The idiosyncratic nature of this approach is a fundamental limitation, though points to an important strength. Through a reflexive account, the construction of the story can be made more transparent, and deeper insight into the processes of change can be gained.

I have made several references to the consequence of writing a plurivocal account for the coherence of the storytelling. My data presentation chapters contain the rich diversity of response and interpretation of De Vere managers and employees, who experienced changing organization during my research. This was one of my aims - telling a complex story of change. The resulting stories require perseverance from the reader, as the central plotlines are obscured by the variety of responses. Without unifying stories, the reader is left to attempt to make their own sense from the fragments presented. While this interpretive process by the reader is inescapable, and out of the control of the researcher, there becomes a point at which this representational strategy becomes unhelpful. The use of terse (Boje, 1995) or ‘small stories’ (Georgakopoulou, 2006), rather than “stories and storytelling in the narrow sense of narratives” (Gabriel, 2000: 22) with resonant plots and characters, may have limitations. Achieving a coherent research narrative relies on the researcher’s sole interpretation, with its idiosyncrasy balanced by a reflexive account. While the boundaries around the definition of a story, suggested by

Gabriel's approach, have been challenged as "difficult to sustain" (Whittle et al., 2009: 438), there may be a case for tighter definition of what constitutes legitimate material in narrative analysis, in order to bring greater narrative coherence without losing plurivocity .

In taking a particular interpretive track, there have been important areas of study that have arisen, but not been followed through. Three particular areas, which were implicit within the stories told yet not addressed explicitly in the thesis, were: the role of emotion; leadership during change; and temporality. My own anxiety has featured frequently in my reflexive accounts, and the emotional content was evident in the responses to change, presented in chapter 6. The impact of the emotional state of interviewees, on their interpretation of organizational stories, would have been a valuable narrative to have followed. Similarly, leadership was a theme that was prevalent in my coding of my transcripts. I have chosen to develop the stories on power, autonomy and control, and these could have been placed within the broader context of narrative and leadership. Finally, I have not developed the concept of time, in this thesis, which is a limitation given "change is a phenomenon of time" (Ford & Ford, 1994: 759), and "we still lack studies focusing on the concept of time, highlighting the consequences of defining time as a theoretical concept in studies of organizational change" (Pedersen, 2009: 390).

I have contributed a further in-depth, case study to the narrative and organizational change discourse; however, there remains the opportunity for further research of this kind. There is a limited number of leading academics (e.g. Beech, Boje, Brown, Gabriel, Humphreys and Sims) in the field, and a greater diversity of voices is needed to build a plurivocal organizational change narrative. As well as continuing the theoretical development of sensemaking, power and identity, a case study approach can extend our narrative understanding of emotion, leadership and time in organizational change. In developing these cases, researchers' attention is required on the definition of



stories and storytelling, in order to produce research reports that achieve both coherence and plurivocity.

#### **9.5 FINAL REFLEXIVE COMMENTARY**

In writing the final words of this thesis, I am reminded that “our experience of the world around us, particularly of what we call ‘living systems’, is one of inherent *becoming* and *perishing*” (Chia, 1999: 217). There is no end, therefore, to this story, or to my ongoing learning and adaptation. There remains a temptation to keep returning to parts of my thesis, to add to, to clarify, or just to delay the fast approaching time when this particular document stops becoming, and begins immediately to perish. The inevitability of this process, within the notion of continuous change, provides some solace from the sadness of a closing chapter.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **Hotels - May 2006**

##### **Introduction**

My name is Graham Abbey and I am conducting some research for a PhD at the University of Bath into change in organizations. This is part of that research and is an informal interview – more of an opportunity for you and me to have a discussion about working here at De Vere. All your answers are completely confidential and I would like you to feel free to be as honest, open and straightforward as you can. I am recording our discussion, but this recording and its transcript will not be seen by anyone besides me, and will under no circumstances be shown to anyone else in the company. I will be speaking to others here and in other parts of the company, as I complete my research. I am interested in your experience of how change takes place in De Vere, both through programmes that the company has launched, like *Shine!*, and through, perhaps, more everyday changes. I have a set of questions to kick-off our discussion, but as I said I want to keep this more of an informal chat.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

##### **Questions**

#### **1. Before we get going, a few quick questions on your role here.**

- a. Firstly, what is your role and job title?
- b. How long have you worked for De Vere? All at the Grand Harbour?
- c. What does your job entail – can you give me a very brief outline of your duties?

#### **2. Let's start talking about change.**

- a. What sort of changes have you seen in your time here at De Vere?
- b. Have these been for the better or the worse? How so?
- c. Can you think of a change that had an impact on you – perhaps it made you laugh or concerned, made you sad, angry or proud? Tell me about it.

#### **3. Now I'd like to talk a bit about *Shine!***

- a. Have you attended a *Shine!* event? What stands out for you now, as you think about that event?
- b. Has anything else happened with *Shine!*, other than the event itself? Tell me more.
- c. Now that the values have been defined, what changes, if any have you made in your daily routine or done differently?

- d. Has there been a particular incident or incidents at work where you have seen other people do something differently, as a consequence of *Shine!*? Can you describe the incident to me – tell me the story?
- e. Why do you think De Vere sees *Shine!* as important?
- f. What do you believe to be the general opinion of *Shine!*?
- g. What challenges, if any, does the company need to overcome?
- h. What do you see as the benefits of *Shine!* for the employees and the organization?
- i. Do you see any disadvantages of *Shine!* for the employees and the organization?
- j. What other changes are impacting what you do in your job at the moment? Are these more or less important to you than *Shine!*?
- k. Since *Shine!*, do you think about De Vere in a different way? If so, how?

**4. To finish with, I have a few more questions about what it is like here.**

- a. Who or what influences what goes on here?
- b. Who has the power to make things happen?
- c. Would you describe this as a political organization? In what way?
- d. Do you see much conflict at work? How does it get resolved?
- e. Are there any special characters here at work? Are there any stories about them?
- f. How about the organization's leaders? What stories are told about them?
- g. Can you think of an incident that sums up for you how change takes place in De Vere? Tell me what happened.
- h. What does this incident say to you about how this organization treats its members?
- i. Is there anything about change in De Vere that we have not talked about that you see as important?

Thank you, I have really enjoyed our discussion. I appreciate you being straight forward with me.

## **Hotels – November 2007**

### **Before we get going a quick recap on my research...**

Has your role changed since we last met?

What are your duties now?

### **Tell me about what has been happening in the hotel over recent months?**

What has been the most significant change in your view?

### **Looking back over the past 18 months, in what ways have things changed?**

Can you think of any examples or stories, which illustrate how things have changed?

What impact have these changes had on you?

How have the changes been received in the hotel? (By different levels, departments etc)

### **Can you identify who or what has been behind the changes you have seen?**

Why have they happened?

What role did Head office play?

Have centrally initiated initiatives (e.g. *Shine!*, Academy etc.) had any influence?

What impact did the change of business ownership have?

Who else has been influential?

What has the business gained/lost from them?

What have managers gained/lost?

What have the staff gained/lost?

### **Is the hotel a different place to work now? In what ways?**

Do different people have power and influence?

Is this power used in different ways?

Is the hotel more or less political?

Are there any instances, stories, examples which stand out as illustrating this?

### **How would you describe your journey through this period?**

Who have been the major characters in your story? The hero? The villain?

What challenges have you had to overcome?

What have you learnt? About yourself? About the organization? About Change?

## APPENDIX 2 – INDEX OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**Table A2.1 – Interviewee Job Title, and Interview Location and Date**

No.	Job Title	Location	Interview Date
T1	De Vere Group Learning and Development Partner	Central Office	April 2007
T2	De Vere Group Chief Executive	Central Office	July 2006
T3	De Vere Hotels Brand Human Resources Manager	Central Office	July 2006
T4	De Vere Group Human Resources Director	Central Office	May 2006
T5	De Vere Group Human Resources Director	Central Office	May 2006
T6	De Vere Group Organization Development Manager	Central Office	May 2006
T7	De Vere Hotels Brand Marketing Manager	Central Office	May 2006
T8	De Vere Group Marketing Director	Central Office	May 2006
T9	De Vere Group Learning and Development Manager	Central Office	May 2006
T10	De Vere Hotels Operations Director	Central Office	May 2006
T11	De Vere Hotels Brand Training Manager	Central Office	May 2006
T12	Grand Harbour Payroll Coordinator	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T13	Grand Harbour Personal Assistant	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T14	Grand Harbour Sales Coordinator	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T15	Grand Harbour Room Service Manager	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T16	Grand Harbour Reservations Coordinator	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T17	Grand Harbour General Manager	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T18	Grand Harbour Housekeeper	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T19	Grand Harbour Restaurant Supervisor	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T20	Grand Harbour Operations Manager	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T21	Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T22	Grand Harbour Guest Services Manager	Grand Harbour	May 2006
T23	Grand Harbour Food and Beverage Controller	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T24	Grand Harbour Telephonist	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T25	Grand Harbour Personal Assistant	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T26	Grand Harbour Human Resources Assistant	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T27	Grand Harbour Room Service Manager	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T28	Grand Harbour Reception Supervisor	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T29	Grand Harbour Sales Manager	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T30	Grand Harbour General Manager	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T31	Grand Harbour Conference Coordinator	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T32	Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T33	Grand Harbour Operations Manager	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T34	Grand Harbour Human Resources Manager	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T35	Grand Harbour Guest Services Manager	Grand Harbour	March 2007
T36	Grand Harbour Personal Assistant	Grand Harbour	Nov 2007
T37	Grand Harbour Reception Supervisor	Grand Harbour	Nov 2007
T38	Grand Harbour Revenue Manager	Grand Harbour	Nov 2007
T39	Grand Harbour General Manager	Grand Harbour	Nov 2007
T40	Grand Harbour Housekeeping Supervisor	Grand Harbour	Nov 2007
T41	Grand Harbour Operations Manager	Grand Harbour	Nov 2007
T42	Grand Harbour Food and Beverage Controller	Grand Harbour	Nov 2007
T43	Royal Bath General Manager	Royal Bath	June 2006
T44	Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager	Royal Bath	June 2006
T45	Royal Bath Front of House Manager	Royal Bath	June 2006
T46	Royal Bath Porter	Royal Bath	June 2006
T47	Royal Bath Operations Manager	Royal Bath	June 2006

T48	Royal Bath Food Controller	Royal Bath	June 2006
T49	Royal Bath Maintenance Manager	Royal Bath	June 2006
T50	Royal Bath Management Trainee	Royal Bath	June 2006
T51	Royal Bath Human Resources Coordinator	Royal Bath	June 2006
T52	Royal Bath Reservations Supervisor	Royal Bath	June 2006
T53	Royal Bath Former General Manager	Royal Bath	April 2007
T54	Royal Bath Assistant Food Services Manager	Royal Bath	April 2007
T55	Royal Bath General Manager	Royal Bath	April 2007
T56	Royal Bath Front of House Manager	Royal Bath	April 2007
T57	Royal Bath Operations Manager	Royal Bath	April 2007
T58	Royal Bath Food Controller	Royal Bath	April 2007
T59	Royal Bath Food Services Manager	Royal Bath	April 2007
T60	Royal Bath Group Reservations Manager	Royal Bath	April 2007
T61	Royal Bath Revenue Manager	Royal Bath	April 2007
T62	Royal Bath Human Resources Administrator	Royal Bath	April 2007
T63	Royal Bath Maintenance Manager	Royal Bath	April 2007
T64	Royal Bath General Manager	Royal Bath	Nov 2007
T65	Royal Bath Front of House Manager	Royal Bath	Nov 2007
T66	Royal Bath Operations Manager	Royal Bath	Nov 2007
T67	Royal Bath Food Controller	Royal Bath	Nov 2007



### **APPENDIX 3 – BACKGROUND ON MY RESEARCH SITES**

#### **De Vere Group Plc**

In 2005 De Vere Group was a hotel and health & fitness company with two distinctive and expanding hotel brands - De Vere Hotels and Village Leisure Hotels, and a standalone health & fitness brand - Greens. The De Vere Hotels brand included 19 properties, with high profile hotels in England and Scotland. In development is De Vere Resort Ownership, exclusive timeshare lodges on its large resort properties, with 115 lodges at that time and now the UK's largest five star lodge operator. The Epsilon brand combined a full size health club, public house and mid-priced hotel in an innovative approach to both the corporate and leisure markets, with 18 sites across England.

In September 2006 ownership of De Vere Group changed with the takeover by the Alternative Hotel Group (AHG). As the purchase prospectus described "AHG was the second investment vehicle created by a number of directors of Investco Plc, acting in a private capacity, ... and a subsidiary of Bank of Scotland. The strategy of the AHG Directors with the financial support of the subsidiary of Bank of Scotland is to acquire and create market leader groups in hotels and other niche sectors of the UK hospitality industry. In November 2005, through a separate vehicle, The Alternative Hotel Group Limited, the AHG Directors and the subsidiary of Bank of Scotland successfully acquired a business group conference and training organiser, now re-named Eta Venues. The AHG Directors see a strong strategic fit between Eta Venues and De Vere, in particular cross selling opportunities. Each of the principal De Vere brands, De Vere and Epsilon, will be grown in its market sector and benefit from marketing opportunities of being part of a large focussed hospitality group together with economies of scale in systems, procurement and purchasing. AHG will complete a detailed review of all assets of De Vere Hotels brand and intends to continue to invest and develop De Vere Hotels brand and to roll-out the Epsilon concept in line with De Vere management's current strategy, making such additional investment as it considers necessary to allow the business to develop. AHG also believes that the AHG directors' significant experience in leisure and property management, coupled with the benefits of private ownership, will help to enhance the long-term value of De Vere." During 2007 AHG began the implementation of the strategy described above, including the sale of a number of properties – for example in Central London. The De Vere Brand was used across newly acquired hotels and the existing Verve Venues, creating three new brands De Vere Deluxe, Heritage and Venues. Significant investment plans were also announced for a number of high profile properties during mid 2007, each attracting up to £25 million. The re-branded Village Hotels and Greens Health & Fitness Clubs remain in the portfolio. At the end of 2007 both the Royal Bath and the Grand Harbour were part of the De Vere Deluxe brand.

**Grand Harbour** ([www.devere.co.uk/our-locations/grand-harbour.html](http://www.devere.co.uk/our-locations/grand-harbour.html))

With its attractive location on the South Coast, this modern hotel has a striking glass atrium structure and provides views over the town's Historic Old Walls and Waterfront. It is a short drive to the New Forest and the beaches of Bournemouth, Boscombe and Christchurch. The Grand Harbour has a total of 244 employees across 19 departments at the end of 2007 and has been open since September 1994. It is the only 5 star hotel in the town and its restaurant has been awarded 2 AA rosette. Facilities include:

- 173 rooms including suites
- Award-winning fine dining restaurant, a more informal restaurant, light snacks at the bar
- Conferences from 5 - 500 with fully equipped business centre
- Fully equipped gym, sauna, steam room, solarium, swimming pool and children's splash pool. Serenity beauty has four treatment rooms and a relaxation area

**Royal Bath** ([www.devere.co.uk/our-locations/royal-bath](http://www.devere.co.uk/our-locations/royal-bath))

Royal Bath is positioned on the sea front, with spectacular panoramic views across the bay and out to the English Channel. With its grand Victorian frontage, the hotel retains many traditional features as well as all the latest amenities. The Royal Bath had 101 contracted employees and 47 casual employees at the end of 2007 and was opened on the 28 June 1838, the day Queen Victoria was crowned. Facilities include:

- The hotels award winning restaurant offering British seasonal food, plus The Garden Restaurant with its views over the hotels landscaped gardens
- 140 bedrooms including 9 suites.
- 8 conference and banqueting suites with the ability to cater for 4 - 400
- Indoor heated swimming pool, spa bath, steam room, sauna, fully equipped gymnasium, beauty treatment room

#### APPENDIX 4 – MARKET ANALYSIS

**Table A4.1 - Main UK Hotel Companies Ranked by Revenue**

<b>Company</b>	<b>Revenue (£000s)</b>	<b>Profit (£000s)</b>
Compass Group PLC	12,704,000	171,000
Ladbrokes PLC	11,505,000	239,700
Scottish & Newcastle PLC	1,714,300	-51,100
Whitbread PLC	1,584,000	101,900
Millennium & Copthorne Hotels PLC	595,200	95,800
<b>De Vere Group PLC</b>	<b>312,031</b>	<b>58,958</b>
QMH Ltd	281,600	800
Stakis Ltd	246,778	17,929
Swift Hotels Ltd	209,634	64,893
Thistle Hotels Ltd	167,587	45,752
Macdonald Hotels Ltd	164,365	-30,289
Silk Street Hotels Ltd	150,979	28,556
Jarvis Hotels PLC	125,552	10,208
Ellerman Investments Ltd	109,067	31,475
Bourne Holidays Ltd	96,927	1,658

Source: Key Note Market Report, Hotels November 2005

**Table A4.2 - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

**STRENGTHS**

- The UK benefits from a high level of international and domestic tourism.
- There is a wide variety of accommodation available at a range of price points.
- Accommodation accounts for a high percentage of tourism spend.
- There are a number of strong international and domestic brands in the market.
- There is also a wide offer of individual and boutique properties to cater for a diversity of tastes.
- The hotel market has taken advantage of current technology by incorporating Internet booking and website-based marketing.
- Hotel operators continue to invest in their product offerings through refurbishment and expansion.

**WEAKNESSES**

- The UK market is oversupplied, as evidenced by occupancy rates.
- Necessary investment in refurbishments and maintenance can be costly.
- Location remains a major factor in consumer choice and hotel operators, particularly of single properties, have no control over this.
- The market is vulnerable to the influence of the wider economy.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- There remains a significant base of non-hotel users within the UK, who can theoretically be targeted.
- The evolution of websites, and rising Internet access rates across the UK, offer substantial opportunities for marketing.
- The evolution of global booking systems and direct live reservations can ease room-management systems.
- The divestment of property ownership from management has untied capital, which can now be used for investment.
- Hotel consortiums and franchising offer the advantages of branding with a lesser need for investment.
- Additional facilities such as bars, restaurants and leisure clubs can generate turnover from non-guests.

**THREATS**

- The mid-market is coming under increased pressure from budget hotel brands.
- Independent operators continue to come under pressure from the rapid expansion and investment of chain hotels.
- The growing internationalisation of travel means that the UK tourism market is under increased pressure.
- The sector is vulnerable to the threat of terrorist activity.
- The Internet offers consumers a high degree of price transparency, which can put pressure on operators to keep room rates down.

Source: Key Note Market Report, Hotels November 2005

## APPENDIX 5 - TIMETABLES FOR EACH *SHINE* EVENT

**Figure A5.1 - Kick-off Event**

Timing	Session	Notes	Delivery
<b>Day 1</b>			
12:00	<b>Arrival Lunch</b>	Participants wearing own badges 4 lapel mikes 1 handheld mike	Venue & Hosts
13:00	<b>Introduction</b>  Introduces facilitator for brief introduction OD underlines the reason why we are starting with John 'Brand as a framework for action'	Walk in music  Into main plenary environment	OD
13.15 20 mins  40 mins	<b>Brand Hot to Not</b> – run by John High energy, getting people moving  Presentation Lights down by facilitator  John introduces the purpose of the exercise Lead facilitator sends to rooms Allocate touch points to groups, on laminated cards	Plenary  Vox pops audio  Posters to support	OD JR  Lead facilitator
14:15	<b>Break</b>		
14:30	<b>Exercise 1 - Brand Advertisement</b> Slide for every touch point used as backdrop Final summary slide with balance of touch points not covered Note: headline statements only Summary statement from John about purpose of use. Reinforces that action is over to you.		Facilitators
16:10	<b>Break</b>		
16:15	<b>Keynote</b> Music for the few minutes 'dreaming'		CL
17:15	<b>Exercise 2 - 'Magic and Baggage'</b> Introduction of what happens next with brand and touch points from OD Avoiding work on central initiatives – Signage Uniforms, bed standards etc	Breakout	Facilitators
18:45	<b>Feedback</b>		

	<p>OD shares personal experience, describing broadly the exercise ahead (pointing out the facilitators will brief in detail)</p> <p>Lead facilitator short input</p> <p>Individual facilitators brief the exercise at the tables</p>	<p>Plenary</p> <p>Addition section on feedback in notes</p>	<p>CL</p> <p>JR</p> <p>OD</p> <p>CP</p>
19:00	<b>Close</b>		
20:00	<b>Dinner</b>		
<b>Day 2</b>			
08:30	<p><b>Review</b></p> <p>Links 2 previous day with this one, moves straight into own values presentation</p>		<p>OD</p> <p>Facilitators</p>
08:40 20 mins	<p><b>Values I</b></p> <p>Values Presentation - OD</p> <p>Allocation of individuals to functional groups – decided in advance and placed on a flipchart or slide</p>	Plenary	OD
45 mins	<b>Exercise 3 – Living Our Values</b>		
45 mins	<b>Exercise 4 - Personal Work Values</b>		
10:30	<b>Break</b>		
10:45	<p><b>Values II</b></p> <p><b>Exercise 5 – Values Feedback</b></p> <p>Group Discussion</p> <p>Action planning</p>	Breakouts	Facilitators
13:00	<b>Lunch</b>		
13:45 20 mins	<p><b>Liberating Potential I</b></p> <p>Operations Director introduces the focus on liberating potential and hands over to external facilitator for input on the theme of personal potential and limiting beliefs.</p> <p>Lead Facilitator introduces levitation and hands over to each group facilitator to brief.</p>	Plenary	OD
15 mins	<p><b>Exercise 6 – Levitation</b></p> <p>Cameras for photos</p> <p>Individual facilitators then brief the next two exercises to their groups, having taken them to their rooms</p>		

45 mins	<b>Exercise 7 – Lifeline</b>		
90 mins	<b>Exercise 8 – Personal Vision</b>		
10 mins	Facilitators round up their group and bring them back into the main room.  <b>Exercise 9 - Group visualization</b> , run by lead facilitator  Lead facilitator introduces next exercise, groups to be in breakout after the break.		
17:00	<b>Break</b>		
17:30	<b>Exercise 10 – Liberating team potential</b>	Plenary	Facilitators
18:30	<b>Putting it all together</b> Will be introduced as an ‘interrupt’ into the back end of the previous session  <b>Drumming</b>  Closing messages from OD or Lead facilitator		
<b>DAY 3</b>			
08:30	<b>Review/Preview</b> OD picks up on lessons from drumming Signals shift to employee focus	Plenary	OD
08:45	<b>Shining Together</b> Christine’s presentation  Christine or lead facilitator does basic introduction to the next exercise and moves groups to break out	Plenary	CP OD
09:15	<b>Exercise 11- Creative Image</b>  Facilitators ask groups to return to plenary after break.	Breakout	Facilitators
10:15	<b>Break</b>		
10:30	<b>Creative Image - Report Back</b>  OD or Lead facilitator introduces concept of The Bridge and moves the groups to breakout	Plenary	OD

11:00			
75 mins	<b>Exercise 12 - The Bridge</b>	Plenary	OD
45 mins	Exercise Review		Facilitators
	This session closes with a plenary overview of what needs to be achieved in the afternoon	Plenary	OD
13:15	<b>Lunch</b>		
14:15	<b>Exercise 13 - Personal Action Planning</b>	Individual	Facilitators
14:45	<b>Exercise 14 - Team Action Planning</b>	Breakout	Facilitators OD and CL will mingle
16:00	<b>Break</b>		
16:15	<b>Review</b>		
	The vision film will be shown again to close.	Plenary	OD
17:00	<b>Close</b>		



**Figure A5.2 - Skill Building Event**

Time	Session	Notes	Materials/ Delivery
<b>Day 1</b>			
10:00	<b>Workshop Introduction &amp; Agenda</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carl Video</li> <li>- Workshop Background &amp; Objectives</li> <li>- The broader change agenda in De Vere Group</li> <li>- Concerns, looking forward and WIIFM</li> <li>- Passion exercise</li> <li>- Agenda</li> </ul>	Show Carl Video	Jointly run by 7days and De Vere facilitator Carl Video Objectives Slide  Agenda Slide
10:45	<b>GM Story</b> - Introduction	Prepare draft introduction working hotel pairs with support of cascade facilitator	Preparation only
11:15	<b>Break</b>		
11:30	<b>'Shine' Cascade Workshop Run-Through</b> Using a roadmap of the workshop on brown paper along the wall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GM Role</li> <li>• Role of co-facilitator</li> <li>• Detailed run-through of agenda</li> <li>• Brief run-through of exercises</li> <li>• Picking up on immediate concerns, questions</li> <li>• Preparing them for developing their presentations</li> <li>• Showing them their materials</li> <li>• Working through pack of materials – 'hands-on'</li> </ul>	7Days lead Session Plan  Box/Bag with all materials
12.15	<b>Exercise 1: Hot or Not?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 mins to read through</li> <li>• Discuss experience of this exercise from Kick-Off event – went well, not so well, how did they feel</li> <li>• What did they notice the facilitator doing</li> <li>• Identify questions to use to facilitate debrief</li> <li>• Capture facilitator notes for running event with own team</li> </ul>	Cascade Facilitator to run if run already at Kick-off, otherwise 7days or De Vere facilitator  Exercise Briefs

Time	Session	Notes	Materials/ Delivery
12:45	<b>Leadership Capability</b> <i>Focus on Leadership</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defining Leadership</li> <li>- Leadership Vs Management</li> <li>- The Leadership Shadow</li> </ul>	Facilitator presents capabilities and talks through slides on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 mins walk through slides and discussion</li> <li>• Leadership shadow exercise 15 mins</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	7days lead and De Vere facilitator supports with real 'De-Vere' examples
13:15	<b>Lunch</b>		
14:00	<b>Exercise 2: Advertisement</b>	• Brief out and review	Participants facilitate
14:30	<b>Facilitation Framework &amp; Exercise Review Process</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Framework</li> <li>- Facilitation vs Presenting</li> <li>- Exercise familiarisation process</li> </ul> Supporting slides only <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Listening</li> <li>- Questioning</li> <li>- Appreciation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present our view of their role as a facilitator</li> <li>• Get them to comment/agree/refine</li> <li>• Clarify role of their co-facilitator</li> <li>• Run-through of 7days facilitation framework</li> <li>• Run-through process of how we are going to prepare them for exercises</li> <li>• Some we will talk through (more simple)</li> <li>• Some we will run and review (more complex)</li> </ul>	7days facilitator  Framework and Review Slides Roles slide
15:00	<b>GM Story</b> - Special Experiences	Tailoring John's presentation for local delivery	Preparation only
15:45	<b>Break</b>		
16:00	<b>Exercise 3: Trust Circle</b>	• Brief out and review	
16:30	<b>GM Story</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specify where GMs have freedom and what about</li> <li>• Provide index cards and give time to work through</li> <li>• Working in small groups with the cascade facilitators</li> <li>• Encouraging them to tell their personal stories</li> </ul>	Cascade facilitators  Index cards
17:15	<b>Exercise 4: Living the Values</b>	• Brief out and review	
17:45	<b>Close of Day</b> Evening work to practice the Introduction, Special experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of day</li> <li>• Agenda for tomorrow</li> <li>• Pace/Timing</li> </ul>	

Time	Session	Notes	Materials/ Delivery
	and Values presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for evening</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
<b>Day 2</b>			
08:30	<b>Check-in</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how delegates are feeling</li> <li>• any feedback from yesterday/a-ha moments</li> <li>• any thoughts/reflections wish to share</li> <li>• Today's agenda</li> </ul>	
08:45	<b>Trust Exercise- Trust Fall</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7days demonstration</li> <li>• Participants practice facilitating after</li> <li>• Draw general lessons about facilitating</li> </ul>	
09:00	<b>GM Presentations</b> Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review available information</li> <li>• Reflect on personal messages</li> <li>• Construct framework of presentation</li> </ul>	Cascade facilitators
9:45	<b>Exercise 5- Values in the real world</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explanation of the exercise</li> <li>• Small teams generating examples</li> <li>• Plenary sharing of examples</li> <li>• Selection of examples for the workshop</li> </ul>	
10:45	<b>Break</b>		
11:00	<b>GM presentations- special experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review available information</li> <li>• Reflect on personal messages</li> <li>• Construct presentation using brand presentations and basic notes</li> </ul>	Preparation only
11:45	<b>Run Exercise 6: Levitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 mins to read through</li> <li>• Discuss experience of this exercise from Kick-Off event – went well, not so well, how did they feel</li> <li>• What did they notice the facilitator doing?</li> <li>• Run Exercise</li> <li>• Capture facilitator notes for running event</li> </ul>	

Time	Session	Notes	Materials/ Delivery
		with own team	
12:30	<b>Lunch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buffet lunch to enable continuation of values scenario's creation</li> </ul>	
13:15	<b>Leading change and dealing with challenging people</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding others' Styles</li> <li>- Managing Challenging Situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk through slides</li> <li>• Thinking about and sharing their own strengths and weaknesses as facilitators</li> </ul>	7days De Vere facilitator
13:45	<b>Agreeing your role out approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unit pairs reflect on the individuals, groups and challenging people at their location</li> <li>• Start to plan their roll out plan</li> </ul>	
14:15	<b>GM Presentations Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review available information</li> <li>• Reflect on personal messages</li> <li>• Construct framework of presentation</li> </ul>	
15:00	<b>Exercise 7: Personal Action Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 minute walk-through of exercise</li> <li>• Exercise working as GM team to capture actions required in preparation for Cascade</li> <li>• Re-run of exercise logistics</li> <li>• Capture facilitator notes</li> </ul>	
15:30	<b>Coffee</b>		
15:45	<b>GM presentations- What next</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review available information</li> <li>• Reflect on personal messages</li> <li>• Construct framework of presentation to complete back at the hotel</li> </ul>	
16:00	<b>Workshop Run-Through</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Final run-through and questions</li> <li>- where are you now in your journey</li> <li>- level of confidence</li> <li>- shaping your ongoing support</li> <li>- what you need to do</li> <li>- how we can support you</li> <li>- Action planning</li> </ul>		

Time	Session	Notes	Materials/ Delivery
16:15	Workshop Close		

**Figure A5.3 - Cascade Event Workshop-in-a-box**

Time Elapsed	Session	Time	Materials
0	Introduction	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slides &amp; notes &amp; Carl's Video</li> </ul>
10	Hot or not? (1)	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief</li> <li>• Laminated Brand Cards</li> <li>• Brand Slideshow</li> <li>• 2 Flipcharts – one with 'HOT', the other 'NOT'</li> </ul>
20	Special Experiences	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slides &amp; notes &amp; vox pops</li> </ul>
35	Advertisement exercise (2)	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief</li> <li>• The description of your brand touchpoints</li> <li>• One specific touchpoint on which to focus</li> <li>• A 'creative box' containing a variety of props for use in the exercise</li> </ul>
1hr 5	Summary	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slide + notes</li> </ul>
1 hr 10	Trust fall exercise (3)	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief</li> <li>• Low elevated platform</li> </ul>
1hr 20	Values presentation	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slides &amp; notes</li> </ul>
1hr 30	Living our values exercise (4)	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief</li> <li>• The values presentation</li> <li>• Large post-it notes</li> <li>• Pens</li> <li>• 4 flipchart pages (1 with each value as a heading)</li> </ul>
2hrs	Summary	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slide &amp; notes</li> </ul>
2hrs15	Values in the real world exercise (5)	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief</li> <li>• Example scenarios</li> <li>• Answer cards (blank A5 cards)</li> <li>• List of the brand touchpoints</li> <li>• List of the corporate values</li> <li>• Flip chart</li> </ul>
2hrs 55	Liberating potential presentation	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Script</li> </ul>
3hrs	Levitation exercise (6)	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief</li> <li>• Chair without arms</li> </ul>
3hrs 15	Special People exercise (7)	35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Script</li> <li>• Brief</li> <li>• Template for note taking</li> </ul>
3hrs 50	What next?	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Shine</i> video</li> </ul>